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SISTER MARY OF ST. FRANCIS







SISTER MARY OF ST. FRANCIS, S.N.D.

# SISTER MARY OF ST. FRANCIS, S.N.D.

HON. LAURA PETRE  
(STAFFORD-JERNINGHAM)

EDITED BY  
DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

"A life that moved to gracious ends  
Through groups of unrecording friends,  
A deedful life, a silent voice."

TENNYSON

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*Nihil Obstat.*

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WESTMONASTERII,  
*Die 10 Februarii, 1913.*

## PREFACE

I HAVE been asked by the Superior-General of the Sisters of Notre Dame, to edit and revise this Life of one to whom her whole Congregation owes, and will ever owe, an immense debt of veneration and gratitude.

It is true that a memoir of Sister Mary of St. Francis has already been published by the late Miss A. M. Clarke under the title of *Life of the Hon. Mrs. Edward Petre*. But this biography is now out of print, and it is thought that there is room for another, written by one of Mrs. Petre's own sisters in religion, and giving more intimate details of her spiritual life and her marvellous labours for souls, than could possibly be recorded by an outsider, however well-informed.

Until I read the manuscript, I candidly confess that I was doubtful of the wisdom of the undertaking, but I have been completely converted by its perusal, and I think that a very large number of readers will agree with me that this Life is too good to be lost. I cannot but believe that many besides myself will be profoundly edified and delighted by this simple record of a beautiful life. My task as Editor has been confined for the most part to mere abridgment, and even this has been undertaken with some reluctance lest the grand lines of the picture should be spoilt by the meddling of an unskilful hand. The modesty of the authoress and the wishes of her Superiors have,

however, combined to lay the task upon me, and I hope that I have not altogether marred the portrait which has been so lovingly drawn.

It certainly would be sad if a life like that of Sister Mary of St. Francis were to be forgotten, especially in her native land. It may be doubted if the work that this laborious and humble religious did for the conversion of England has been surpassed by more than a very few of her contemporaries. Her record of achievement is indeed a marvellous one, and it is made still more wonderful when we recall the fact that it was effected by one who was self-exiled from her country for the love of her Divine Spouse.

From her quiet retreat at Namur, this noble woman worked night and day for the Catholic cause in England, especially for the souls of our little children, to whose salvation she devoted her great fortune, her greater powers of heart and intellect, and her very life. The story told in these pages gives the wonderful details, and gives also some glimpses of the secret motive-power of all this generous and devoted activity, a burning love of Jesus and of the souls for whom He died.

None of us lives for himself alone, none of us, whether he will or no, can live in this world without exercising some influence upon others. And in the same way, we all of us owe much to those who have gone before us, as well as to those who have trained us in childhood. The traditions of a noble race are an inheritance of priceless value, and the finest characteristics of souls like that of this holy religious are often to be traced back through a long line of ancestors who have made *Noblesse oblige* the watchword of their lives. So it was with Sister Mary of St. Francis. This book will prove how her love for the poor, her fidelity to the





VEN. SIR WILLIAM HOWARD, K.C.B., VISCOUNT STAFFORD

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Church, her love for Christ's Vicar, formed part of that goodly heritage which she received from those who had gone before her.

One more touching example of this truth may perhaps be cited here.

After the death of Sister Mary of St. Francis, there was found among her papers an old, worn letter, which had evidently been cherished as a family relic for nearly two centuries. It may be well to quote from it here ; for it seems to give, in a few lines, a true idea of the spirit which animated the fine old Catholic stock from which the subject of this memoir derived not merely her noble blood, but a far more precious inheritance—her staunch devotion to the one true Church of Christ.

The letter, which is before me, is written in a beautifully clear and firm hand, and is dated " July y<sup>e</sup> 22, 1733."

The writer is William Howard, second Earl of Stafford, and grandson of the martyred Viscount who died for the Faith on Tower Hill, on the Feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury, in the year 1680.

The letter is endorsed : " To be given and read by all my children or the survivor, or survivors, of them after my death.—STAFFORD."

" My dearest Children," it runs, " I have just now made my will and think fitt to explain my mind to you in a more particular manner than I could doe in it. I shall be very short and pray All. God to inspire you to follow the few directions that I here give you.

" Pray be good, be kind, and affectionate to each other, and free and easy amongst your selves, behave your self in the like manner to all your Relations.

" Pray your selves daily for your Father and Mother and procure them all the prayers you can. Your

Mother was a tender good Mother, tho' it was not God's holy will, may be for my sins, she did not live to make you sensible she was so. My dearest son, as it has been God's Mercy to keep almost your Ancestors [*sic*] and family in his holy religion, fear the heaviest judgment fall upon the Man who forsakes it for vile unchristian motives. (What can there be ?) Adhere to it by profession and practice, and serve God in the old only true way."

Lord Stafford then goes on to make some provision for his daughters, "Should Allm. God out of his infinite mercy call you all or any of you, to serve him in a religious house," and concludes as follows :

"That the Blessing of Allm. God may light upon you all, at least in the next world (for this is nothing), and that wee all may, thro' the merits of our Redeemer, meet your poor Mother in heaven, is with my heart to you all the sincere wish of your truly loving Father."

Such were the family traditions, such the spirit that animated those from whom Laura Stafford-Jerningham drew her origin. But it may well be doubted if any of the members of this house, since its illustrious Martyr, even of those inspired by God "to serve Him in a religious house," can have been more worthy of everlasting remembrance than the humble subject of this biography.

Her life was a checkered one, at least, in outward circumstances, but in reality it was animated throughout by a Divine and beautiful unity. Brought up, as we have seen, in the best Catholic traditions, taught from her childhood, both by word and by example, to love the poor and to show her love by sacrifice, as a girl, as a wife, as a widow, as a nun, she lived not for herself but for Christ, Who became poor for our love,

and for the poor who are His members and His representatives on earth.

It would be difficult to find for her whole life a more suitable device than the Stafford motto: "Abstulit qui dedit."

God gave much to Laura Stafford-Jerningham, and gradually He took it all away. He gave her a beautiful home, wise and tender parents, rich in the traditions of a noble ancestry, richer in the Faith which had been handed down to them through centuries of persecution, a devoted husband, a large fortune, beauty, health, and great possessions; what more, indeed could He have given her? True, there was one thing denied her, to have little children of her own. But if He had given her this, could she have carried out His merciful designs for her, and become the spiritual mother of countless children? Those children still "rise up and call her blessed"; they will be her crown in heaven for all eternity.

And as He gave much, so He asked much of her, and willing, indeed, was she to give her all. He took away from her, one by one, her parents, the dear circle of brothers and sisters, the noble-hearted husband, the home of her youth, the very native land she loved so passionately. If He did not deprive her of her worldly goods, He took away her right to spend them as she would, by binding her to His Cross by the sweet bonds of Holy Poverty. But one thing He never took away, nay, He ever increased in strength and intensity that devoted love for Him, for His Church and His poor, which was the mainspring of her life until the end.

"Abstulit qui dedit," how often in her long life did that lesson come home to her wounded but ever generous heart!

Still, even in this life she had her reward, that *centuplum* which Our Divine Lord promised to those who leave all for His sake. If she lost, as we all must lose in time, her dear parents, God gave her in return the love of her spiritual mothers in a quite extraordinary degree. There is nothing more touching in the Life, it seems to me, than the picture that it reveals to us of her relations with Mère Constantine and Mère Aloysie; nothing more beautiful than this tender religious affection and mutual confidence which bound together so closely these grand souls. She was indeed surrounded all her life by devoted affection. Her spiritual sisters and daughters, the novices, she formed for Christ, vied with one another in devotion, and more than replaced the happy family circle which she had left. Hers was essentially a happy life; there were no doubt great trials (and perhaps the greatest ever remained the secrets of her own soul), but on the whole it was a truly happy, as it was a truly meritorious, life.

"Abstulit qui dedit." When He took away at last the primal gift of life, He gave her in return, we cannot doubt, life everlasting according to His own most blessed promise.

And for her monument? Surely there is no need to ask. We shall find it at Liverpool, at Norwich, at Plymouth, at Manchester, at Clapham. in all those great and flourishing houses scattered over the length and breadth of the land, which owe their existence mainly to her. These are her life-work, these are her crown and glory.

And who can ever reckon the souls that will owe their salvation to her work?

"Abstulit qui dedit." He took her away, indeed, to her reward and her rest, but He left behind her the

fruit of her labours, and the harvest she had sown. And thus many a generation of English Catholics will call her blessed ; and the prayers, and the faith, and the love of little children will ever increase her accidental glory in heaven, as the work of Notre Dame continues to flourish in our land.

May God, in His great mercy, raise up many souls like her to help on this glorious cause of our country's conversion ! One who was competent to speak, said that she was one of those souls who are only given once to a Religious Congregation, but we may hope that as the need is very great, so the Lord of the Harvest may yet send us other such rare and chosen souls who may devote themselves to His work with the like selfless devotion, intelligent zeal, and unstinting generosity.

DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

*September 12, 1912,  
Feast of the Holy Name of Mary.*





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# SISTER MARY OF ST. FRANCIS,

## S.N.D.

### CHAPTER I

#### COSTESSEY AND THE JERNINGHAMS

"Cossey is the spot where I first learnt to think and to feel. . . . What is best in me are the feelings of chivalry imbibed in childhood. They have kept me out of harm's way—in an ideal world, above the meannesses of life, though not, I trust, above its duties."—*The Jerningham Letters*, ii.

THE country-seat of the Stafford-Jerninghams, Costessey (often spelt and always pronounced Cossey), is pleasantly situated about four miles from Norwich, at a spot where the Wensum most nearly approaches the Yare.

A hundred years ago, when the subject of this memoir was born, the name Costessey (House by the Waterside) was more fully justified than at present ; for the lake near the house has been drained, though still the River Tudd gleams at intervals through the masses of magnificent trees in the park.

Costessey is entered in Domesday Book as "Cotesia," a royal manor, with feudal rights over twenty-four parishes, which was granted by William the Conqueror to his son-in-law Alan of Richmond. In the sixteenth century it formed part of the divorce-dowry of Anne of Cleves ; and on the death of Anne, her least obnoxious step-mother, Queen Mary gave it to her

loyal servant, Sir Henry Jerningham, in whose family it still remains.

The house, which Sir Henry built for himself and his descendants, stands in a beautiful and extensive park—nine hundred acres of undulating lawns and wooded hills. On one of these hills Queen Mary's Tower commemorates the spot where "the only lady of the Tudor line" loved to rein in her horse and gaze at the ships in the offing—distinctly visible at that period, although Costessey is forty miles from the sea. Among the picturesque plantations on the south and east, a laurel grove surrounds St. Walstan's Well—one of the three which, according to tradition, bubbled from the earth when the body of the husbandman-saint was drawn by his team of self-yoked oxen to the tomb prepared for him by angels in Bawburgh Church.

Attached to the Hall is a chapel dedicated to St. Augustine, large enough to seat comfortably two hundred persons, and built, says Bishop Milner, "according to the useful as well as sublime and beautiful manner of our wise and religious ancestors." For the period at which it was erected, it is certainly a remarkable specimen of the English Perpendicular style. The architect drew part of his inspiration for the design from that "glorious work of fine intelligence" at King's College, Cambridge, which inspired Wordsworth with the lines :

"Give all thou canst ! High Heaven rejects the lore  
Of nicely calculated less and more."

The twenty mullioned windows are filled with very fine old stained glass collected from various monasteries on the Continent. All the woodwork is of dark oak elaborately carved ; and conspicuous in the decoration-scheme is a row of oaken hatchments, showing the illustrious alliances of the Jerninghams.



FONT, ST. AUGUSTINE'S CHAPEL,  
COSTESSEY HALL





The family at the Hall are accustomed to kneel on a raised dais opposite the altar; and in the crypt beneath the sacred edifice the bodies of thirty of its members await the Resurrection. The first tenant of the vault was the builder of the chapel, Sir William Jerningham, whose funeral took place on the morrow of its solemn consecration, August 21st, 1809.

*Give all thou canst!* On the 15th of January, 1811, eighteen months after the venerable baronet had passed to his reward, his little grandchild, Laura Maria, was borne to the font in the chapel he had erected, to receive there, on the very day of her birth, the grace of Holy Baptism. Seventy-five years later she appeared in her turn before the Judgment-Seat of God; and there it availed her nothing to have been in literal truth "the daughter of a hundred earls" with royal blood in her veins, or even to have reckoned among her ancestry two of England's illustrious martyrs. *Her works alone followed her* to that dread Tribunal, and they attested that those words of Wordsworth, which she must have heard quoted so often as a child, had sunk deep in her heart and coloured the whole tenor of her life on earth.

But heredity, as well as local association, is an important factor in the long, long thoughts of childhood which so largely influence the after-career. Some account of Laura's family therefore is no less essential to a right understanding of her character than this brief description of the home of her early years.

"The name Jerningham, or Jernegan," says Weever, "hath been of exemplary note in East Anglia even before the Norman Conquest. Tradition assigns to the race a Danish origin, from one Jernegan, brother-in-arms to King Canute, who embraced Christianity and settled down in East Anglia shortly after that

monarch's famous pilgrimage to Rome. Few private families in England can show such a lengthened succession of knights and baronets, subsisting for so many centuries by lineal male descent in one original stock, and unshaken in their allegiance to the Faith of their ancestors. They usually married into families of equal or superior degree: Dacres, Fitzosberts, Throgmortons, Bedingfelds, Waldegraves and Scropes."

The Fitzosbert heiress brought the Manor of Somerley in her dower; and Camden mentions, in the parish church of that locality, the effigy of a Crusader with the pious epitaph:

"Jesu Christ, both God and Man,  
Save Thy servant Jernegan!"

The name changes to Jerningham in the sixteenth century, when Sir Richard Jernegan, or Jerningham, hung his shield—argent with three armynge buckles gules—in the lists of the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

His grandson, Sir Henry, kept the Eastern Counties loyal to Queen Mary, and won over to her cause the very fleet sent to cut off her communication with the Low Countries. Mary Tudor was not ungrateful. Sir Henry's prompt action on her behalf was rewarded by lucrative dignities, and manors in Norfolk, Suffolk, Hereford and Gloucester. Of these he selected Costessey as a permanent residence, and built himself there a mansion, which remains to this day a fine sample of the Tudor style of domestic architecture.

A priest's hiding hole was contrived above the grand entrance porch, for the building was not completed till well on in the reign of Elizabeth. That Queen visited Sir Henry and nearly ate him out of house and home. However she allowed him, in reward for his prompt furnishing of light horse for the Armada,

to compound for his religious liabilities by an annual payment to the Crown.

In the seventeenth century the Jerninghams were not much molested for recusancy. They could not "keep their church," for Costessey Church was in ruins, like many other country churches in those districts of Norfolk, where the landlords were recusants and powerful enough to carry things with a high hand. But they suffered as Catholics and Cavaliers, and had to sell their estates piecemeal. Under Cromwell, indeed, Costessey itself was disparked, the deer destroyed, and the land let to a farmer.

Yet the Hall remained a centre of Catholicity throughout the Penal Period. One priest at the least was always an honoured resident, and the chapel in the attic was not unlike that other Upper Chamber in Jerusalem where the Early Christians met in secret to celebrate the Holy Mysteries.

Family traditions and heirlooms supply details of the scene enacted, Sunday after Sunday, till the Relief Act of 1793. There still remain the curious oaken pews, black with age, where the lord of the manor knelt with his wife and children; the little pulpit, easily folded up and laid aside; the cumbrous piece of furniture, seemingly an old-fashioned bureau, which served as altar and sacristy combined.

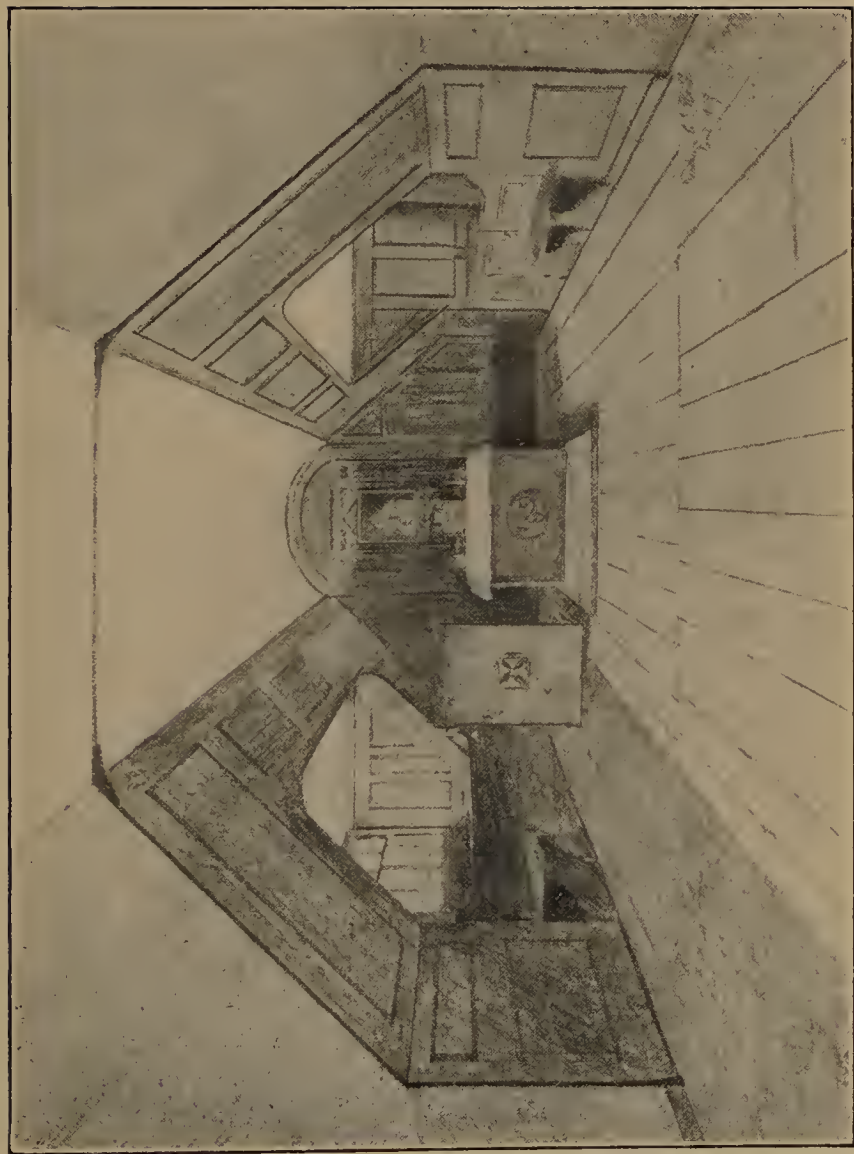
Outside is the narrow, winding staircase (its entrance in the park skilfully masked) which the Catholic neighbours and tenantry climbed by stealth, to hear Mass and approach the Sacraments. At the top of the staircase the eldest son of the house stood, pistol in hand, barring the entrance to any spy who should venture thither, lured by the hundred pounds offered for the betrayal of a "Mass-priest." When the last of the faithful had arrived, the door of the attic-chapel was

fastened from within. But the sentinel remained on guard outside till the sanctuary assumed its everyday aspect, and the altar-stone was lowered to the hole contrived for its concealment.

None of the Jerninghams died on the scaffold for the Faith, but there were at least two sturdy little confessors of the race. In the *Chronicles of St. Monica's, Louvain*, we read of two grandsons of Queen Mary's champion—the younger a lad of ten—who were sent to school at Oxford. Among other hard dealings, "they were three times a week sorely whipped, for to make them forsake their religion," and so beaten about the head that one of the boys became deaf, and the other bore throughout life "the scars of the wounds and gashes." The "hot heretics," their masters, "dared not starve them on Fridays for fear of their friends; nevertheless they would, before their faces, put the ladle of their flesh-pots into their porridge. . . . All this they suffered willingly for Christ's sake. Having read what the martyrs had suffered, they would not complain to their father of their entertainment, but bore it out with patience until the bunches and gashes in their heads discovered the same."

From time to time, in the Penal days, the sons and daughters of the Jerninghams went on the Continent, to be trained as priests, to enter religious orders, or, like their ancestor, Jernegan the Dane, to seek the godly education and the scope for military talent which the religious laws of their country denied them at home.

Some of Laura's earliest recollections were associated with the life-sized portraits of two surpliced canonesses, the twin Miss Jerninghams of a former generation. Her own uncle William had in early life entered the Austrian Army, under the auspices of his



ATTIC CHAPEL, COSTESSEY HALL





great-uncle, General Jerningham ; and so German in idiom did he become as to write calmly home : " Our regiment *dare* not fight the French till the end of the war,"\* when the Capitulation of Hornstein debarred him from active service during the 1795 campaign. He profited by this enforced leisure to visit his native country, and attended a levee of George III. Being an Austrian officer, of course he *dared* not kiss the royal hand. Very soon afterwards, perhaps because of this omission, the Duke of York had him gazetted to a regiment in the English Army, which was mainly composed of Irish soldiers. In 1802 William had Mass said in barracks on the Feast of St. Patrick ; for while Napoleon loomed large on the political horizon, it was deemed expedient not to deny the " Tommy Atkins " of that day whatsoever spiritual luxuries his soul desired.

In each generation matrimonial alliances were contracted with the most highly respected Catholic families of England. Of these the most pertinent to our story is the marriage of Sir George, the fifth baronet, with Mary Plowden—a marriage which engrafted on the time-honoured stock of the Jerninghams that branch of Stafford on which the long-attainted title was to blossom once more.

Their son, Sir William, Laura's grandfather, married Frances, daughter of the last Catholic Viscount Dillon, a descendant (through her mother) of the Blessed Margaret Plantagenet, and known among her intimates by the playful title, " Her Most Catholic Majesty." From her pen come the most interesting pages of *The Jerningham Letters*, two bulky volumes often quoted in biographies dealing with the period of the French Revolution and the struggle in England for Catholic Emancipation.

\* Of course he meant " *may* not fight."

Many émigrés, including the brothers of Louis XVI. and "the Orleans trio," were hospitably entertained at Costessey, its sprightly chatelaine frankly admitting :

"I like to have several people in the house, and a multitude cannot be had cheaper than the unfortunate French. No servants, no horses, no *drinkings* !"

Among the refugees whom Lady Jerningham delighted to help were the distressed religious of her own sex. Protestant friends were solicited, and very successfully too, for donations in money. Catholics were invited, over and above this, to play cards on their behalf—games of *commerce*, where the proceeds of the pool went to destitute nuns with a request for specified prayers. One community was entertained at the Hall itself until a house in Norwich could be found and furnished for them—the "Blue Nuns" of the Immaculate Conception, a Parisian Convent which had been for English Catholics, in Penal days, a fashionable and well-organized place of education for girls.

But while her sisters in religion found shelter with her Costessey kinsfolk, one of the Blue Nuns—Sister Ursula, once the Lady Anastasia Howard, and still *de jure* Baroness Stafford—refused "to run to England for a bit of bread," as she quaintly words it, adding (it was in 1795) :

"For my part, I have never wanted that yet, though for a time I had much less than I could have eat. If I ever go, it will be to get some cloth, for my shifts are almost quite gone. Every week I am forced to put patch upon patch, and the coarse cloth we make them with is nine francs an ell."

On the death of this aged religious in 1807 her heir-at-law, Sir William Jerningham, lost no time in pre-



senting to the King his petition of right to be summoned to Parliament as Baron de Stafford.

"If we get the barony, it will do very well for the present," writes his wife; though in point of fact the heralds could easily have made out his claim to the earldoms of Stafford, Hereford, and Essex.

Yes, a Baron's vote is equal to an Earl's in the House of Lords; and the whole question of the Stafford peerage was regarded by the Jerninghams as a fighting asset in the struggle for Emancipation.

Sir William's own tastes were of the simplest. His youth had been spent in the armies of Louis XV., where he acquired the exquisite distinction of manner, but none of the vices of the old régime. To this refined courtesy he added the solid worth and open-handed hospitality of an English gentleman, and the benevolence, free from all taint of condescension, which seems less a virtue than a hereditary instinct among the Jerninghams. Much of his leisure was spent in improving and beautifying his Costessey estate, and several times a week the general public were allowed to walk or ride among his extensive plantations in the park.

Sir William sometimes visited the tenants on his land, to share with great relish their frugal dinner. Needless to say, he selected the cottages where cleanliness reigned supreme, and where the food, however homely, was wholesome and well-cooked. So the house-mother was made happy by the implied compliment; the children, who vied with one another in attending to his wants, received a useful lesson in the ethics of the dinner-table; and the worthy baronet could exclaim with perfect sincerity:

"How happy you are to be able to do everything for yourselves! I enjoy this style of thing far more than the formal dinners at the Hall."

“ On dit du bien de cette famille partout,” said George III. “ Ce cher Jerningham est le plus honnête homme que je connaisse.”

“ He was kind to the poor, not like the rest of the great ones !” was the verdict of a “ boldly discontented ” Radical cobbler in the West of England, ten years after Sir William’s death.

The cobbler’s memory no doubt went back to the days when the new inventions in machinery were shifting the textile manufactures from rural districts to towns on the great coalfields. The distress around Norwich was especially acute, and our baronet felt it his duty to provide employment for his poorer neighbours. He had never been a rich man ; but his children were all settled in life, and he could trust to their filial affection to provide for their mother’s future requirements. So he felt free to begin building operations on a grand scale. It seemed the most practical course to adopt, for there is a clay, peculiar to Costessey, excellently adapted for the manufacture of bricks ; and the family mansion was inconveniently small according to modern standards of comfort.

But his own dwelling was of secondary importance in Sir William’s eyes, while the House of God was a garret thereof.

“ Remember, O Lord,” prays Bishop Milner in the funeral discourse pronounced in Costessey chapel on the 22nd of August, 1809, “ Remember his zeal for Thine honour and service ! Behold, he found Thee and the holy Ark consecrated to Thy immediate Presence, in the remote and obscure situation in which the intolerance of former times had forced his ancestors to conceal their devotion. He had adored Thee therein, and he has since invited Thee and Thy holy Ark, to take possession of a place more worthy of Thy



SIR WILLIAM JERNINGHAM, SIXTH BARONET

*From a painting by Opie*



Majesty, and better adapted for Thy holy worship. Give rest, oh ! give Eternal Rest to the soul of Thy servant William !”

Sir William left one daughter, Lady Bedingfeld of Oxburgh, and three sons, of whom George, the eldest, succeeded him in the baronetcy and the claim to the Stafford peerage. Sir George had married ten years previously Frances Xaveria Sulyard, of Haughley Park, Suffolk, “ a beautiful girl,” so her mother-in-law tells us, “ still more handsome by day than by candle-light, and resolved, on principle, to do right on all occasions.”

During her widowhood, Lady Jerningham came rarely to Costessey. She resided mostly in London with her youngest son Edward, a talented lawyer, devoted to Catholic interests and ubiquitous in the cause of Emancipation. She lived just long enough to see her eldest son entitled to take his seat in the House of Lords ; for her death took place in 1826, just after Parliament had reversed the Attainder of the Venerable Viscount Stafford.

## CHAPTER II

### THE JERNINGHAM WAY

“ My uncle talked with everyone he met, especially little children, and gave them halfpence. This is the Jerningham way : I have it quite. A little curled head, with a fat face and innocent eyes, is quite irresistible to me. So are grey hairs and pale faces—in fact, all faces peeping out of cottages.”—*Jerningham Letters*, i.

DESPITE the Duke of Norfolk's prediction in 1807, that the claim to the Stafford peerage would pass both Houses of Parliament “ as easily as a Turnpike Bill,” seventeen years were to elapse before Laura's father was officially permitted to assume the title which, for convenience' sake, we shall give him throughout this book.

On the death of Sir William, August, 1809, the future Lord and Lady Stafford came to reside permanently at Costessey Park, with their eight children, of whom Charlotte the eldest was just eleven, and Henry Valentine—afterwards the ninth Baron Stafford—a promising boy of nine. There were besides these, the eight-year-old twins, Georgina and Frances, three boys—Edward, George, and Charles—and the baby in arms, Mary Alethea.

On January 15th, 1811, a ninth child, Laura Maria, was baptized in the Chapel at the Hall on the very day of her birth, the sponsors being Lady Knatchbull and Lord Clifford of Chudleigh. She had two younger



brothers, William and Francis, and in 1815 the birth of Isabella completed the family circle.

George IV., no mean authority on such points, pronounced Lord and Lady Stafford to be the handsomest couple he had ever met. The children inherited their parents' good looks. All grew up tall and dark eyed. Most of them had aquiline features like their mother, but George and Laura were of a distinctly Grecian type.

It was a common tradition in the neighbourhood that Laura had the use of reason before the age of five. Certainly she retained vivid recollections of the excitement connected with the victory at Waterloo, and the earliest anecdote on record of her sweet sunny disposition dates still farther back.

Little Alethea was a fretful, sickly child, very jealous of her younger sister. On days when she was more than usually peevish, the only way to maintain peace in the nursery was to put Laura in the corner. The dear baby always trotted off without demur, obediently covering her face with her pinafore as she went, and seemingly quite aware that she had done nothing to deserve disgrace. It is only fair to add that the nurse-maid usually contrived to slip a piece of sugar into her mouth, unperceived by Alethea, and when this had had time to dissolve she would call out sternly :

"Now, Miss Laura, are you going to be good?"

And instantly the curly head turned round, the dimpled face peeped smilingly from behind the pinafore, and with a gentle but decided "Yes, Kitty!" the child resumed her play.

Alethea died very young. In 1813 Lady Eleanor Butler, one of the eccentric recluses of Llangollen, alludes in stilted phrases to "the sad event at Cossey," when "the little angel spread her wings and soared

above all human miseries." Thus there was a great gap, both ways, between Laura and her sisters next in age ; and this circumstance had perhaps its effect in the moulding of her character.

Good nature and mutual politeness were points strongly insisted on in nursery and schoolroom ; but the boys, being human, sometimes came to blows. When this happened, the peacemaking little sister never failed to restore harmony by thrusting herself bodily between the combatants. What mattered the pain of a random blow, not intended for *her*, if a quarrel were stopped and its punishment averted ?

Seldom in disgrace herself, Laura was always ingeniously tactful in sparing to others the pain of inflicting, or the shame of receiving a reprimand. She one day heard her father complain of the careless way the drawing-room carpet was swept. Early next morning she begged leave to go quietly downstairs and pick up any bits of paper or thread which might still be left lying about.

"Do let me, Kitty !" she pleaded. "Papa will be so pleased, and he won't have to scold the poor servants."

This Kitty, or Catherine Doggett, came of a family on the estate which had often entertained Sir William Jerningham to dinner. She was only thirteen when she was chosen, from the girls attending the village school, to help in the nursery at the Hall. She soon became warmly attached to Laura, then a baby three months old.

"I shall never leave you, Miss Laura !" she often declared.

The child sometimes retorted, "But, Kitty dear, what will you do when I go to be a nun ?"

"Where you go, Miss, I go too," was Kitty's un-



varying rejoinder. And for thirty-seven years she faithfully kept her word. Parting with this devoted attendant and lifelong friend was not the smallest of Laura's sacrifices on leaving the world. Kitty, on her side, valued more than the comfortable house and annuity settled upon her her beloved mistress's very last gift—the glossy tresses she had cared for with such affectionate pride from the cradle to the eve of the noviciate.

When Laura was six years old, her parents took their eldest girl, Charlotte, for a trip to Paris. The Royal Family treated them with marked distinction; but, except in a few illustrious instances, the restored émigrés showed themselves less mindful of the kindness received at Costessey during the bitter days of exile. There is a ring of disappointment in Lady Stafford's letters at this period. She writes to a friend at Bromley :

“ *March, 1817.*

“ Our stay among the Parisians is drawing to a close, to the great gratification of Sir George, who often recalls to my mind ‘ the happy years past when every one was shut up in England.’ He would sooner live on a crust of bread at Cossey, he says, than in splendour anywhere else, *for a continuance*. But he is glad to have been here : so am I. It is a land of contradictions. A pleasing, *heartless* people inhabit it, though there are many exceptions to a very general rule. . . . How delighted I shall be to see my little family again, and dear Cossey also ! I can really say with truth what I wrote to my beloved little Laura :

“ Give me again my hollow tree,  
My crust of bread and *liberty*.”

“ Charlotte and I have been taking singing lessons. The French *romances* are some of them pretty ; but

at the Opera they *squall* Italian music to French words, most horribly. Last night they sang the music of Glück—beautiful but murdered.”

It is not surprising that during this tour the original plan of placing the three eldest Miss Jerninghams at school in Paris was abandoned, and that Lady Stafford decided they should finish their education at Costessey under her personal supervision. So she looked out for a suitable French governess, and at Amiens, on the return journey, had the good-fortune to meet a young girl whose teaching and influence had no small share in the moulding of Laura’s character. Victorine Boudoux Darcour was only in her twenty-first year, but upright, trustworthy, and intelligent; and the minute regulations which Lady Stafford drew up for her guidance compensated for her lack of experience. She outlived all her young charges, and retained to the last none but pleasant recollections of the twenty years she spent in the Jerningham household.

“I can never be grateful enough to Divine Providence,” she said when over eighty years of age, “for placing me in a family to which I owe more than I can express in words. Not only was I loaded with kindness, but the example of virtue around me was most edifying.”

She fell in love at first sight with Laura—then a pretty child of six—with wonderfully intelligent, dark eyes sparkling with fun, and a curly head, poised with unconscious grace, as she improvised elegant attitudes, while her feet moved rhythmically to the music played by her elder sisters.

Mademoiselle Darcour was subject to severe headaches which obliged her sometimes to keep her bed. Laura, who early manifested a strong attraction to the

sick and suffering, delighted on such occasions to sit by the invalid and affectionately render her every little service in her power. One bitterly cold day—she was scarcely eight—when she crept into the darkened room, she noticed that the fire was nearly out. Here was a puzzling dilemma. On the one hand, her sense of obedience—for the children were strictly forbidden to touch the fire—on the other, her love and pity for her suffering governess. At last she said in a tone of plaintive entreaty :

“ Dear Mamzelle, do let me stir the fire just this once ! The room is so cold, and if you are not kept warm your headache will only grow worse.”

“ Of course I consented gratefully,” added Mademoiselle Darcour, recalling the incident in after-years. “ And I said in my own mind : ‘ What a grand woman this child will make ! ’ ”

But though nurse and governess learned to value aright the unobtrusively helpful influence of her cheerful submission, and the affectionate, thoughtful tact which continued throughout life to be one of her most charming characteristics, the references to Laura in the family diaries and letters are disappointingly scanty, perhaps just because neither conduct nor health gave cause for uneasiness.

Some months after Mademoiselle Darcour’s arrival, Lady Stafford gives an account of her children in another letter to Bromley :

“ *February 24, 1818.*

“ Charlotte is come out since you saw her, and is my agreeable companion. The twins are improving in growth and intellect, though neither in so rapid a way as Charlotte at their age. But you would find them greatly improved. Laura is an active child in mental and physical powers. She is much advanced

in her education. Mr. Jones and Madame began this, and I have now a very pleasing, intelligent French governess for the three. The rest are all well and happy, and the schoolboys all well and give satisfaction. Henry is taller than I am, and gives unusual promise for his age. We should be very grateful to Almighty God for all these blessings."

In the following spring the Costessey family were in London for the season. Charlotte was presented at the famous Drawing-Room where, according to Lady Jersey, "the Prince Regent personated the whole sequence, King, Queen, and Knave."

A few days later Laura spent the day at her grandmother's, playing with her favourite cousin, the daughter of Edward Jerningham. "They are the same age," writes Lady Bedingfeld, "both pretty, but a great contrast; for Clementina is flaxen-headed, while Laura has black hair and the expression of a pretty gipsy."

There was another guest, the Abbé Bonavita, "a healthy-looking man about sixty, speaking French with some difficulty." He had formerly been chaplain to Napoleon's mother, and was now on the way to exercise his sacred ministry in the Island of St. Helena.

The "pretty gipsy" was already sufficiently fluent in both French and Italian to follow the very interesting conversation that ensued; for Lady Jerningham had much to hear and much to tell about the lonely rock in mid-ocean. A beloved niece of hers had gone there with her husband, General Bertrand: they were the *honnêtes gens* for whose company at Elba the Emperor had thanked God aloud.

Two summers later, Laura was just getting out of bed when Lady Stafford's maid ran in with the news:

"Bonaparte is dead!"

Forthwith the child began dancing round the room, with such energy and animation that she upset her bath, and broke both ewer and basin on the wash-stand. The noise brought the governess on the scene with a sharp reproof for such unseemly display of joy.

"Oh, Mamzelle," cried the pupil, in no wise abashed, "how can I help feeling glad? That man will never again be able to persecute the Church and our Holy Father!"

The Bertrands made rather a long stay in England on their way home from St. Helena. There was some delay about passports, because the General's death-sentence had never been revoked, or because (as Edward Jerningham declared) the French Government of that date would find itself embarrassed by the presence of so high-principled a man. They were quite the lions of the London season, and of far more consequence socially than their whilom gaoler.

"Sir Hudson Lowe, late troublesome Governor of St. Helena, is in London. He dined lately with Prince Esterhazy. Lord Londonderry was there and inquired who he was. This gave pleasure to Madame Bertrand, who says that at St. Helena they supposed him known to the Universe" (*Jerningham Letters*, ii.).

The arrival of the passports prevented the Bertrands from accepting a very cordial invitation to Costessey. However, Lady Jerningham was careful to send thither any edifying details she could gather concerning Napoleon's last days.

But although Madame Bertrand was denied the pleasure of roaming with her children over the hills and valleys she had loved in girlhood, there were plenty of other cousins. The Bedingfelds from Ox-burgh, and the children of Lord Stafford's brothers paid lengthy visits to the cradle of their race, and spent



many delightful hours fishing the crystal streams (in which diversion Bishop Milner once got a thorough ducking), or picnicking in some unconventional way.

Mademoiselle Darcour tells how some of these cousins inveigled her young charges into the solitary act of disobedience which occurs in her reminiscences. It was an article of the schoolroom code not to pick fruit without leave ; but one glorious autumn day, as the children were playing in the orchard, one of the guests—a bright, imaginative lad—suggested that they could evade the law by biting into the apples as they hung within tempting reach. The proposal was hailed with delight, and the difficulties of this novel mode of feasting made it all the more enjoyable. But Laura's conscience soon began to prick ; and she insisted that Mademoiselle Darcour should at once be told of the misdemeanour, volunteering to be spokeswoman and to take the lion's share of the blame. Her frank reasoning evidences acute discernment, as well as genuine humility.

“ To my mind downright disobedience would not be half so bad,” she told her companions. “ There is such a want of honesty in what we have just done. We kept the letter of the law and broke its spirit.”

After one of her visits, Lady Bedingfeld notes in her diary :

“ *Christmas, 1820.* — My stay at Cossey was a mingled cup of pleasure and pain. Fraternal affection, however endearing, does not give that vivifying, sheltering feeling of paternal tenderness. I now stand beside the sun : I once stood under it. Cossey is the home of those I dearly love, but it is no longer mine. My father lies in the vault, my mother's chair is empty. A new race of children has sprung up, most amiable, most affectionate, and little dreaming that in their



OLD HALL AT COSTESSEY PARK, ISLE





disjointed conversation they sometimes abuse objects I have been accustomed to admire, and tap about with unhallowed hands things that were once deemed precious. . . . My sister-in-law told me that when the drawing-room was to be painted, Sir George said, 'My mother is coming to Cossey, and she has been used to see it green: let it again be painted green.' She added: 'The motive does him honour, but I should like to have it scarlet.' Oh! how I loved green in that moment, and yet how anxious I felt to paint it scarlet—scarlet with my own hands!"

There seems to have been a certain aloofness innate in "the proud Lady Stafford" (as her acquaintances called her) which prevented her sterling good qualities from evoking in her sister-in-law any warmer feelings than hearty esteem and ungrudging admiration. But over and over again in the family letters, allusion is made to her keen sense of duty, and as time went on, and she caught more of the "Jerningham way," her character mellowed into attractiveness. She was very attentive in her ministrations to the sick in the neighbourhood of the Hall. Indeed, one old dame grumbled loudly when anyone else volunteered to arrange her couch:

"Nobody here knows how to make a bed except her ladyship."

The children sometimes went with their mother on these charitable excursions, and carried her parcels.

Of actual poverty there was none on the estate. The annual distribution of clothes and food, which took place at the Hall on Christmas Eve, was looked upon as a kindly Christmas box. During the last week in December the park was thrown open to all comers, and any one who chose might cart away the dead wood. The little Jerninghams noticed how eagerly

the villagers availed themselves of the privilege, and on half-holidays enjoyed collecting fuel for a rheumatic old widow whom they numbered among their friends. Laura, as responsible head of the nursery party, used to drive the donkey-cart through the park; while Willie and Frank sat behind with folded arms, dangling their legs, as they had seen real working-men do in the lanes, but ready to jump off and work with a will when Laura pointed with her whip to some suitable dead boughs.

Thus did the eldest of the four little ones use her influence over her brothers for good. Among her pleasures the people around her noticed that she really enjoyed most keenly those that were for her the occasion of kindness to others.

But if the Costessey tenantry were sure, year in year out, of a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, whether brick-making or crop-raising, the case was far otherwise in Norwich and other East Anglian towns, where the looms stood idle and the men sauntered listlessly about, because the rigid Laws of Settlement, then in vogue, made it practically impossible for a man without a certain amount of capital to remove his domicile beyond the limits of his parish.

There were fixed days in the week when the hungry knew that a meal could be had for the asking at Costessey Hall; and paradoxical as it may sound in this twentieth century, it was then considered less degrading to walk four or five miles in quest of a dole of food, than to claim a share of the Poor Rate from the local relieving officers. For those were the days when the infamous Gilbert Act was in force, giving a premium to laziness and a higher premium to a vicious life.

Lord Stafford's study overlooked the courtyard where the hungry crowd assembled, and his bell rang

fast and furious when he thought the butler was too dilatory in attending to their wants. Sometimes the butler considered that certain individuals came too frequently, or were clamorous and overbold in their demands. But his master would suffer none to be sent away unfed.

"They would not come unless they were hungry," was his unvarying comment.

With such an example before them, the Costessey children learnt at an early age the duty of almsgiving, less according to means than to needs, and that reverence for God in the person of his poor, which induced Laura's eldest brother, even when an old man, to dismount from his horse when it was his privilege to hand a beggar an alms.

Hall and village were bound to each other by the tender ties of spiritual relationship; for as soon as the young Jerninghams were of an age to understand the significance of Holy Baptism and the responsibilities it entails, they were allowed to act as sponsors to the babies christened at the Hall.

In after-life Laura was accustomed to pay for the education of her god-children. In childhood they came in for the lion's share of her pocket-money. On one occasion she had saved enough to buy the material for a frock, and, under supervision, had made the greater part of it with her own hands. She deserved the treat of carrying the parcel to the home of her little friend, and it was a very happy little girl who tripped lightly homeward through the park at her governess's side. Mademoiselle Darcour improved the occasion by pointing out the far higher value her gift would have had, in the Eyes of Him who praised the widow's mite, had it entailed more personal privations, and not been offered merely "out of abundance."

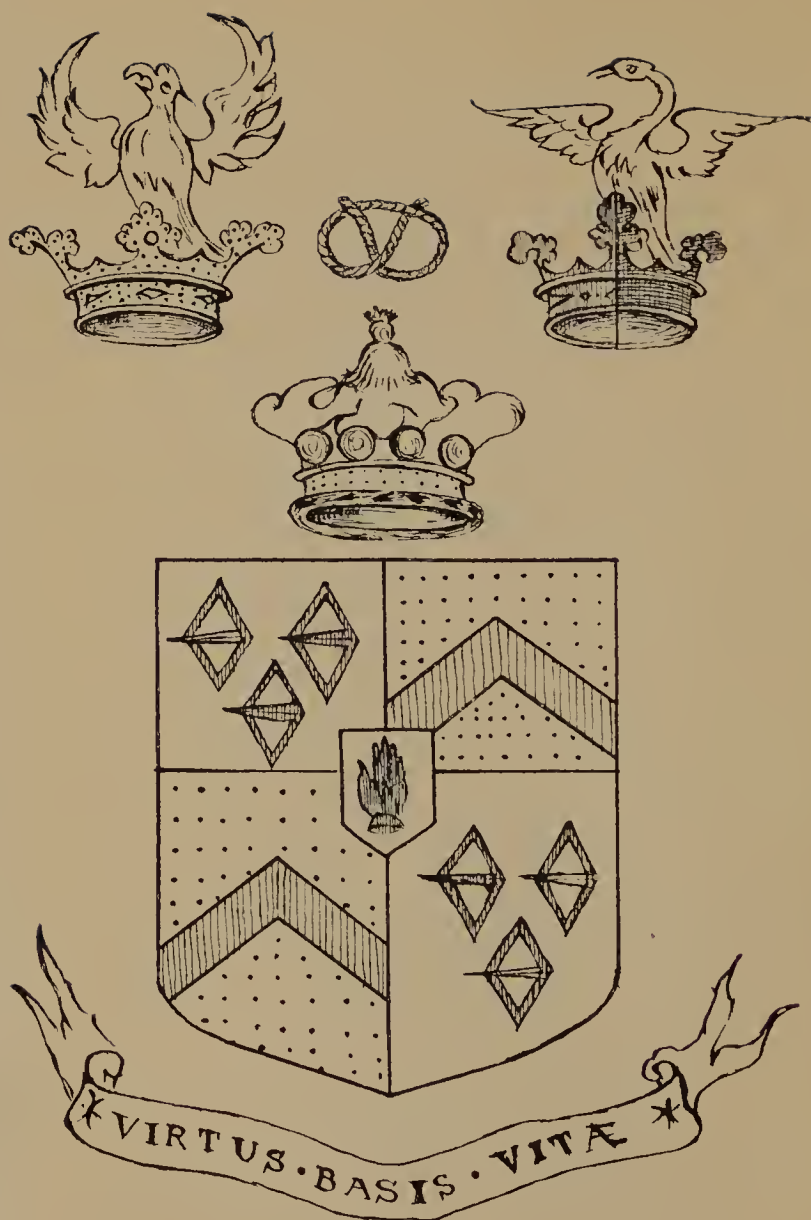
Laura walked on for a while in unbroken silence, frequently passing her hand across her forehead—a habit of hers when vexed or confused.

“Mamzelle,” she exclaimed at length, “it is not my fault if my parents give me everything that I can possibly want!” Then, after a few minutes of hard thinking: “Oh, Mamzelle! such a splendid idea! You know I always take two lumps of sugar. If I take only one in future, I am sure mamma will allow me to save up the other for Miss Clara.”

Sugar was expensive in those days, and a luxury outside the means of an infirm old lady who lived in the neighbourhood, and for whose benefit the children now and again sacrificed their dessert. On this occasion the required permission was readily granted. And for several years—probably till Miss Clara’s death—a little packet of sugar reached her regularly each week “With Laura’s love.”

Many children would have formed the generous resolution in a moment of enthusiasm. Very few would have had firmness of purpose to carry it out during a series of years. But Laura was gifted with a strong will, “a Norfolk sin,” she humorously called it, and both mother and governess concentrated their energies on further strengthening this “mistress faculty” by a judicious course of training.





ARMS OF JERNINGHAM QUARTERLY WITH STAFFORD



## CHAPTER III

“VIRTUS BASIS VITÆ”—JERNINGHAM MOTTO\*

“Even as the green growing bud is unfolded when Springtime approaches,

Leaf by leaf is developed and warmed by the radiant Sunshine,  
So was unfolded here the Christian lore of Salvation,  
Line by line from the soul of childhood.”

LONGFELLOW.

HITHERTO we have noticed how local associations and hereditary instincts may have influenced Laura's character. Now we have to consider how the whole child was trained—her physical, intellectual, and moral faculties developed, with a view to render her as happy as possible here below and perfectly happy in heaven.

In this well-regulated household the children never saw anything in their parents which they might not safely copy. Lord Stafford inherited Sir William's polished manners and dignified courtesy. He loved God truly and tenderly, and esteemed it a duty and a pleasure to make others happy. He always felt lively zeal for the religious improvement of his neighbour, however rich or however needy. It was his holy

\* The modern bookplates in Costessey Library show two crests, the Jerningham falcon and the Stafford swan, as well as the curious Stafford knot, a medieval invention—so runs the story—to hang three malefactors with one rope. But the Jerningham motto, “Virtus basis vitæ,” supersedes that of Stafford, “Abstulit qui dedit.”

custom to visit the sick, the infirm, and the aged on his estate, to pour words of consolation into their hearts, and to speak to them of God with the zeal and energy of one who thoroughly felt the value of piety, and the importance of the one thing necessary. At his funeral it could be said in the presence of those who had grown up around him :

“ For more than forty years he has been daily seen in his place in this holy temple, at the hour of prayer and Sacrifice, the first to enter and the last to leave. And frequently did he bend to whisper into the ear of the poor, as they knelt at their devotions, and humbly request their prayers.”

Laura was well in her teens, before the family mansion was enlarged and beautified to suit modern exigencies of taste and comfort. But the chapel, as we have said, was from the first an artistic gem ; and no pains were spared, no expense deemed too great, to carry out worthily the details of religious worship. The Divine Guest in the Tabernacle was emphatically the Master of the house ; and the child, who grew to womanhood beneath the same roof with her God, rejoiced throughout life whenever she heard that a new church or convent had been opened to be “ another home for the Blessed Sacrament.”

Unpunctuality at Mass was not tolerated among children or servants. The household were carefully instructed how to pray in the spirit of the Church, and Laura at the age of eight knew how to derive fruit from the use of a missal.

Dr. Husenbeth, who came to the Hall as chaplain just after his ordination in 1820, was already an enthusiast in matters liturgical ; and he was responsible for the instruction of the young people in the dogmas, history, and ethical teaching of the Church. In



after-years we shall find Laura appealing to him for enlightenment when it behoved her to uphold Catholic principles in Society, and when as a nun it became her privilege “to instruct many unto Justice.”

Religious and moral instruction was not treated as a purely intellectual matter—a lesson to be given at certain fixed hours and to begin and end with those hours. Lady Stafford was alert to seize every opportunity of awakening holy thoughts in the minds of her children, and of lifting their young hearts to God. Not content with showing them in her own life an edifying example of piety and virtuous deeds, she personally superintended the details of their education, and never for an instant forgot her responsibility as a Christian parent.

“May all this turn to the honour and glory of God, and the eternal happiness and welfare in this world of our beloved son,” is the grateful comment in her diary when Henry entered at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and the encomiums of his tutors there testified to the soundness of his previous training at Costessey and at Oscott.

Henry, who remained throughout life Laura’s favourite and trusted brother, was indeed a son of whom any mother might be proud. Lady Bedingfeld loved him as a baby.

“He is so stout and strong,” she playfully writes to her friend, Matilda Betham, “that one feels none of that tender interest a helpless child inspires till one looks at his eyes, and they are so smiling, so gracious, so innocent, that it is impossible not to attempt to raise his little Herculean person to one’s heart” (*House of Letters*).

His grandmother writes after an illness which he sustained during his last year at Oscott :

“ The good Henry of Cossey is now quite well and most irreproachable every way. But he represents to the life the truth of Lord Normanby’s speech for the Catholics—the hardship of a parent, who, seeing a son with intelligence to make a figure in life, is obliged to say to him : ‘ You must be satisfied with your own correctness and not intermeddle with what may be passing, as drawing breath in your own country is all that is allowed you.’ Henry seems to be *désœuvré* and downcast, though with talent and judgment. His horizon damps his spirits ” (*Jerningham Letters*, ii.).

When Mademoiselle Darcour arrived at Costessey to be Lady Stafford’s intelligent assistant, the four elder boys were already at Oscott ; and Charlotte, her mother’s “ agreeable companion,” was from the first more friend than pupil. The schoolroom party consisted of the twins (aged fourteen), Laura (six), and Willie (five). The three-year-old Frank and the baby Bella were of course at first under the nurse’s care.

The mother upheld the young governess’s authority with all the strength of her own, and was at one with her in the matter of rewards, praise, reprimands, and punishments. “ Mamzelle ” on her part carried out with minute precision the detailed instructions given her, endeavouring to enter into their spirit, and to apply them discreetly in cases where discretion was allowed and expected.

God gives special graces to Christian mothers for the right upbringing of their offspring. In Lady Stafford’s case these graces had been supplemented by the experience gained while corresponding faithfully to them in the training of her elder children. The commands issued, even in the nursery, were reasonable and tended to the planting of virtuous habits. The children were accustomed from the very cradle to take

an active part in their own education by yielding prompt and ungrudging obedience. To do right was first taught : why it was right would come later.

Such obedience seemed natural to Laura. She enjoyed pleasing those she loved, and her inclinations never seemed to clash with her duties. Her early training stood her in good stead throughout life.

The time-table drawn up in Lady Stafford's handwriting contains such significant phrases as :

“ Under all circumstances you must obey readily and cheerfully.”

“ I hope all my children will practise mutual kindness, courtesy, and politeness.”

The minor virtues of neatness and punctuality were also emphasized, and every hour of the day had its allotted occupation.

“ Rise at seven. Arrange in proper order everything used while washing and dressing, and see that no drawers are left open or untidy.

“ Prayers in schoolroom. Look over lessons in silence till breakfast.

“ Anyone who comes into chapel after Mass has begun must give the reason to Mademoiselle Darcour, and will receive a bad mark.”

Only three meals are mentioned : breakfast at eight, during which French was spoken ; luncheon at half-past twelve, followed by two hours' exercise in the open air when possible ; and dinner at six, followed by music and dancing in the drawing-room, or else by games in the garden, or a walk in the park, according to the season and weather.

Intellectual and moral activity is scarcely possible, unless a healthy soul animates a healthy body. Montaigne was right when he said : “ To energize the child's mind, brace his muscles and stiffen his sinews.”

Reference to the time-table shows how judiciously bodily exertion was distributed throughout the day. Lady Stafford attached great importance to exercise in the open air.

“Whatever the weather,” said Laura in after-life, “we were obliged to march, march, march—whether we liked it or not, in hail, rain, or snow—at least four times round the gravelled walks of the flower-garden, my mother having discovered that this distance exactly measured a mile.”

The child had one natural aversion which she never quite overcame. “Whilst yet a little girl,” she owned later, “I took a great dislike to meat, and could only be induced to take it with the greatest trouble. At last they told me I ought to eat it to please God. Since then I have always tried my best to take what I could of it.”

Eating between meals was not encouraged. Sometimes Mademoiselle Darcour would pull out her watch and allow the children five minutes to gather their own dessert in the fruit-garden. She tells, as an instance of their minute obedience, that Georgina did not venture to eat a strawberry accidentally crushed, without first coming to ask leave.

When the little ones came down to dessert after their parents' dinner, each was allowed to choose two kinds of fruit or sweets to be eaten in silence at a side table. In the opinion of one who visited Costessey as a child, “the conversation of the elders, though never dull, was invariably instructive and edifying, for Lord and Lady Stafford took care that it did not degenerate into anything savouring of frivolity or mere personal gossip.” Thus eyes and ears were usefully occupied, and Laura learnt to cultivate the art of intelligent listening, which later on formed perhaps her most

attractive charm in the eyes of men like Brougham, Palmerston, and Leopold I.

Studies engrossed six hours and a half in the day—from nine to half-past twelve, and from three to six. “Lessons to begin and end with a short prayer.” The lighter branches—drawing, singing, needlework, dictation, dancing, and reading—were usually in the afternoon. Probably much of the morning work was done out of doors in summer, for a walk is put down in the time-table from ten to eleven during the winter months. When at Costessey, Lady Bedingfeld usually gave her “lectures” to her own children in the park.

The curriculum was not overcrowded. There were enough specialists to secure efficiency in the teaching staff, and the individual attention desirable with pupils of varying ages and attainments. Lady Stafford herself looked after the English and the history. There was a master for dancing and perhaps for drawing. The chapel organist, a very competent man, gave the music lessons.

A large proportion of time each week was devoted to French and Italian. The method was mainly conversational, and great use was made of systematic dictation. To the end of her career, Sister Mary of St. Francis retained a preference for the “Ollendorff” method of imparting the first rudiments of modern languages. Besides the formal lessons, French had to be spoken at breakfast and from three to six in the afternoon. Any one lapsing into English at the forbidden times received a black counter, and could only get rid of it by passing it on to the next delinquent. The holder of the counter at the end of the session had to learn a page of Grecian or Roman history during play-time.



In general, Laura applied herself with energy to those branches which required a certain amount of mental exertion. It was a real pleasure to teach her, though her impetuosity and impatience made the task no easy one at times. She was very quick at languages. Her first governess was an Italian lady, and she spoke that language fluently and with a pretty accent. Her knowledge of French improved with her opportunities. In Mademoiselle Darcour's opinion she could, when six years old, sustain a conversation in the three tongues better than most children double her age.

Her progress on the piano was less satisfactory. When the hour for practising scales and finger exercises arrived, it was half-piteous, half-ludicrous, to see poor Laura incessantly twisting round on the music-stool to see if it was not time to discontinue the distasteful task. But a keen sense of the beauties of harmony is by no means incompatible with a lack of mechanical skill, and though Laura was a very imperfect performer on the piano she had a sweet voice, "that excellent thing in women," and a correct ear.

She heard none but good music in Costessey; and then there were occasional visits to London, where the young people sometimes stayed with a Norwich family resident at Bromley. Their host was a dilettante in music and did not let them miss much that was worth hearing. His wife's pet hobby was botany; and perhaps it was her example that set them hunting for specimens in Costessey woods, and initiated those natural history collections which remained, reverently preserved by Henry's filial affection, in his mother's sitting-room even after Laura, the last survivor of the joyous band, had met her dear ones in another world.

These visits to London were meant to have a certain

educative value, giving the children brief glimpses of the great world where they were one day to play their part, and helping them to think out for themselves how to express practically that love for the neighbour which was of such importance in the Jerningham way of serving God.

The following may be of interest, as illustrating the topics Lady Stafford discussed with her friends or in her chats with her children. The girls are the future Lady Lovat, then in her sixteenth year, and the twins Georgina and Frances, who were looking forward to their thirteenth birthday.

“COSSEY,

“*January*, 1816.

. . . “If Tuesday will suit you and Mrs. Pitchford for my children’s promised visit, it will be more convenient for me. I should like the girls to see the Blind Asylum, the Cathedral, a Lancaster school, and whatever else you think will amuse and at the same time usefully interest them. Pray let Mrs. Pitchford allow Charlotte to follow St. Jerome’s advice and keep her veil down.

“I have read with much interest Madame de la Rochejacquelin’s Memoirs, and I much admire the mixture of piety, liberality, heroic daring, domestic love and simplicity which mark the character of the chiefs of the once happy Bocage as well as of the peasantry, whose sacred love of home is most delightful. I would recommend to our ministers the reading of this book. I feel convinced the situation of the Catholics cannot remain as it is ; and if once the bigots determine to retrograde and raise a persecution which would touch the Irish clergy, they (the ministers) might look at this instructive book and tremble ! Millions of voices would then call, and not in vain,

‘Rends-moi mon Dieu!’ The open plains of Erin would be as terrible as the thick-set hedges of La Vendée, and the inhabitants still more daring. But let us hope the blindness of our rulers may be dissipated by a ray of that liberality so many know how to preach to others, but which so few practise.”

Lady Stafford, as already mentioned, reserved to herself the congenial task of cultivating in her children a love of healthy literature and sound views on history. There were few children’s books in those days—though Maria Edgeworth was beginning to write for them, and Charles and Mary Lamb were friends of the Jerninghams. Annotated school-texts of our English classics were of course also a thing of the future. But the mother read aloud and explained simply some of the masterpieces of Shakespeare and of Scott, and encouraged questions and artless remarks.

“To-day,” she notes in her diary (April 15th, 1821), “I began *The Lady of the Lake* with Laura, Willie, Frankie, and Bella. They enter into its beauties very well for their age. Willie was quite distressed at the fate of ‘the gallant grey,’ and Isabella inquired if there was not a *Lord* of the *Lake* as well as a *Lady*.”

In after-life Laura used to refer to the educative value of these informal lectures which developed the mental powers and gave a taste for solid reading, rendering her in her turn capable of directing the reading of others.

Scott had always been a favourite at Costessey, since the day when Charlotte Jerningham\* and her poet-uncle sat down “to feast like a pair of angelic gluttons” on *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The younger generation enjoyed the Waverley Novels as they came out. Scott’s fictitious heroes are always

\* Lady Bedingfeld.



vivid realities to whatsoever "gentle reader" he has caught young. What, then, must have been the enthusiasm of the young Jerninghams, whose own cousin married the Duke of De Croy-Dulmen—a descendant, of course, of *Quentin Durward*! What their filial reverence for the grand old cavalier of *Woodstock*, when they realized that they themselves were great-grand-children of a Lee of Dytchley!

But *Peveril of the Peak* was somewhat of a disappointment, as it must ever be, says Lockhart, to "those who have studied the terrible tragedies of the Popish Plot in the authentic records of perhaps the most disgraceful period of our history." It is not surprising to learn that Lady Bedingfeld is responsible for the humorous note on the Jerninghams, which Scott appended to the second edition.

#### NOTE ON A LANCASTER SCHOOL (p. 33).

On May 21st, 1808, Lady Jerningham writes to her daughter, Lady Bedingfeld:

"Yesterday I went to see Mr. Lancaster's school in Southwark, and a most wonderful sight it is! In a very large room that he has partly built are rows of desks, and five hundred boys are taught reading, writing, orthography, and arithmetic at the rate of about seven shillings a year. Lancaster is the only master over these children, and they are in the strictest military order. Boys whom he calls *monitors* overlook those less advanced than themselves, and the whole goes on like clockwork. He teaches writing, reading, and spelling together. A great many schoolmasters from the country were walking about, to examine the method. He is a Quaker, and has the most good-natured manner and countenance that can be.

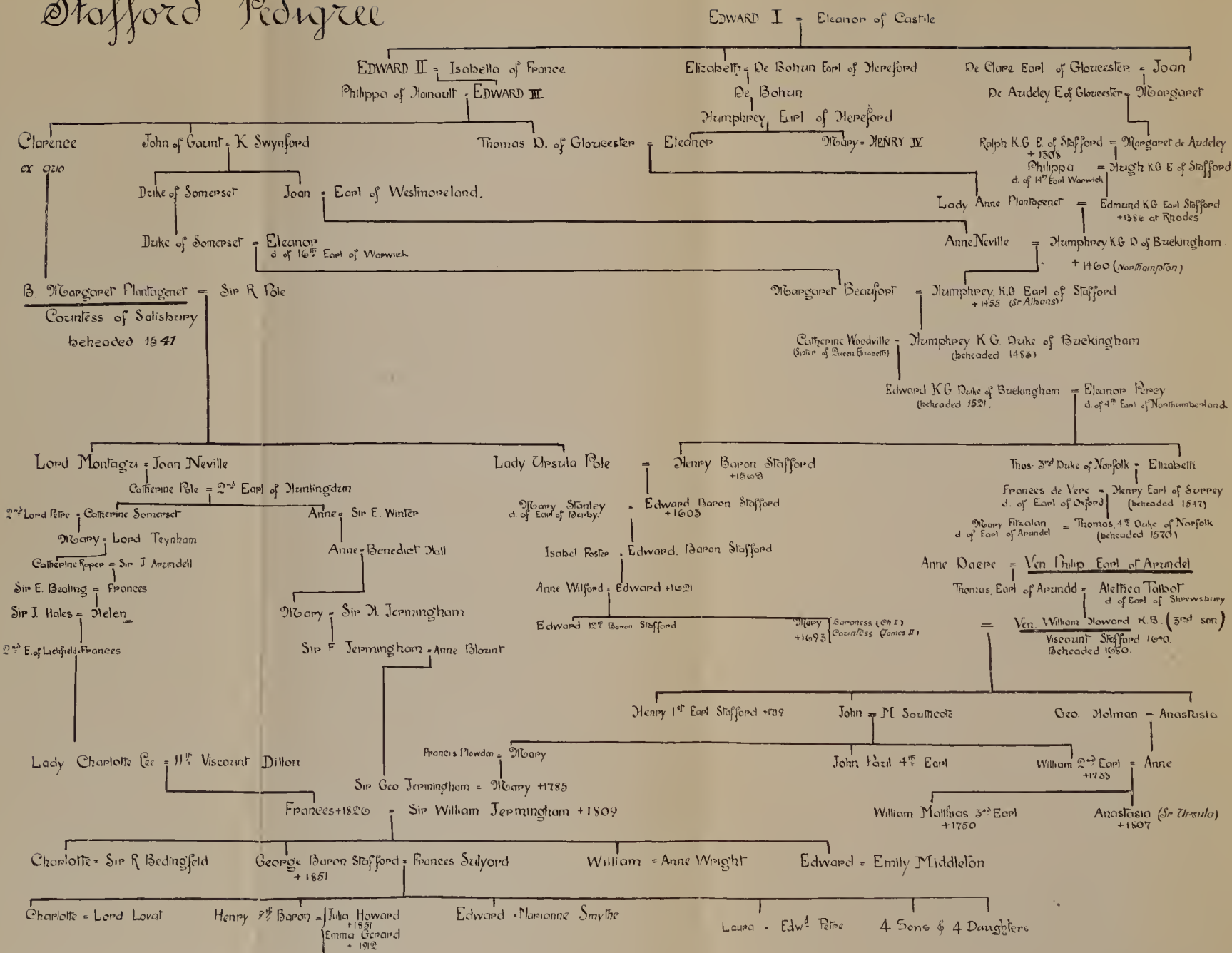
“ I do not myself yet quite comprehend why the children learn reading there quicker than elsewhere, but he says that six months is sufficient for a common knowledge of reading. I saw slates of boys about ten years old written in a master’s hand.

“ Flogging is unheard of. There are various other marks of disgrace which have a great effect. The little boys are put into a wooden cradle, for instance. If the cradle is ordered to be rocked, the obloquy is dreadful. Others are sentenced to keep their finger in their mouth, and this has the double effect of making that habit (which so many children have naturally) be felt as disgraceful. The bigger boys have wooden collars, and some are drawn up in a cage ; but all goes on without manual infliction.

“ There is a great party against him, but I trust a still more powerful one for him. He gets no pecuniary emolument. The subscriptions go for the charity ” (*Jerningham Letters*, i.).



# Stafford Pedigree



## CHAPTER IV

### SIMPLE FAITH AND NORMAN BLOOD

“ It is not a little to have a past on which to live, to have branches on the family tree tipped with ruddy blossoms, and an occasional lily brightly peeping through its gloomy foliage ; to have in one’s pedigree the name of a man who [died] for the Faith, or [lived] for conscience’ sake a perpetual exile from home and country.”  
—CARDINAL WISEMAN.

CIRCUMSTANCES combined to make history a fascinating branch of study to Laura. During the receptive period of her childhood, the Penal Laws were in the last throes of their agony ; and the conversation at her parents’ table would naturally gravitate to the glorious hardships of the bygone centuries, and the bright years to come with the era of Emancipation.

She lived in an old house which had been the home of her ancestors for many generations, and where there were many precious heirlooms to recall their past services to Fatherland and the sufferings endured for Faith. Lady Bedingfeld — so like Laura in many ways—mentions such early associations as accounting for the ease with which she could recall the figures and occupations of those who were in their graves before she was in her cradle. Thus, she writes to her friend Matilda Betham about a Guild Banquet in St. Andrew’s Hall, Norwich : “ There were five hundred guests and many quaint ceremonies ; and during the three hours

the dinner lasted I amused myself by making out how the county table was filled three hundred years ago."

Then, too, it is a truism in pedagogy that the teacher's favourite subject is likely to be a favourite with the scholars. Lady Stafford was keenly interested in historic research. There is a suggestive entry in her diary (1822) :

"April 23rd.—I began Lingard's *History of England* Thursday, and the last breadth of Gina's worked gown Saturday."

She prepared for the Press a pamphlet on the *Genealogy of Jerningham*, and spared no pains to make it full and accurate.

Moreover, the Stafford Peerage question loomed large on the Costessey horizon. Many interesting lessons on our national history could be based on the official document printed by Hansard in 1812, to show clearly the Jerningham descent, "without any chasm in the links" from Edmund summoned to the Parliaments of Edward I., in virtue of his tenure of the Castle and Manor of Stafford, granted at the Conquest to his ancestor, Robert de Stafford.

Edmund's descendants served the Plantagenets both in France and in England. The letters K.G. might well indicate an hereditary dignity, so regularly do they recur in the pedigree from the first institution of the Order of the Garter till the days of Henry VIII. The expression "Daughter of a hundred earls" is no hyperbole, but well within the truth when applied to Laura, for her doughty forbears increased their patrimony and feudal influence by a series of brilliant marriages; in fact, until the change of religion restricted the matrimonial field, they selected their brides among the Plantagenets, or in families where the Plantagenets selected theirs.



- Laura heard much, as a child, of the family stronghold with its five turrets round the great Keep and its fifteen bedrooms, "each with a fireplace and a draught." Her father actually began to restore Stafford Castle in exact conformity with the original design, but had to give up the attempt, for (not to speak of expense) the windows were loop-holes, the walls eight feet thick, and the rooms either too big or too small for the modern requirements of domestic comfort. The pretext for its erection by Ralph, the first Earl of Stafford, was the lawless condition of the Midlands during the French campaigns of Edward III. There is ample evidence in the muniment room at Costessey that Earl Ralph did not limit his feudal responsibility to the mere protection of his vassals, but catered well for them, soul and body. He founded and endowed friaries and hospitals, "in perpetual alms," to quote from the charters, "for the healthful state of the said Ralph, Margaret his wife, and their children, while they should continue in this life; and for their souls, when they should have departed this life; and for the souls of their ancestors and of their heirs, and of all faithful men deceased."

His grandson Edmund married the Lady Ann Plantagenet, only surviving child of that Duke of Gloucester on whose untimely death hinges Shakespeare's tragedy of Richard II. Students of that drama will readily remember the widowed Eleanor of Gloucester, a very distinguished lady indeed, great-great-grandchild of Edward I.; eldest daughter and coheiress of the High Constable of England, Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford; and sister-in-law of Henry IV. On the death of her great-nephew, Henry VI., the entirety of the estates and dignities of the House of de Bohun became vested in the Staffords.



From Edmund's marriage with the granddaughter of Edward III., sprang "the Right Mighty Princes, Dukes of Buckingham, hereditary High Constables of England, seised in fee of the earldoms of Hereford, Essex, Stafford, Northampton, and Buckingham; and by Letters Patent from Henry VI., entitled to precedence of all Dukes, whether in France or England, excepting of the Blood Royal." These noblemen were very prominent in the fighting and politics of the fifteenth century; for the feudal advantages attached to the possession of five earldoms were, in their case, enhanced by personal ability, and by kinship with the great Houses of Beaufort, Neville, and Rivers. Shakespeare has made us familiar with the two last Dukes of Stafford—Buckingham, whose popularity, talent, and nearness to the Crown aroused the jealous fears of the usurper Richard, and of the two succeeding Henrys.

There is still at Costessey a chasuble, embroidered with the armorial bearings of the last duke, and among the quarterings the Royal Arms of England are blazoned in the dexter-chief. Perhaps this vestment had more to do with his attainder in 1521 than the historic ewer of water which he is said to have upset over Cardinal Wolsey.

Be this as it may, the true glories of the house began only after "the long divorce of steel" had severed the "mirror of knighthood" from life and dignities. His son Henry was summoned to Parliament, under Edward VI., as plain Baron de Stafford. He married the Lady Ursula Pole, daughter of the Blessed Margaret, Countess of Salisbury.

When the Beatification of the English Martyrs was a thing of the near future, the sisters and pupils of Notre Dame were, of course, their enthusiastic clients.



THE MARTYR'S WIDOW, MARY COUNTESS OF STAFFORD



Sister Mary of St. Francis, while promoting this devotion, never emphasized the fact that she herself was descended, and by three distinct lines, from this heroic princess.

Nor was Blessed Margaret the only one among her ancestry to give this clearest possible proof of loyal allegiance to the Catholic Faith. The Jerninghams could also claim descent from the Venerable Philip, Earl of Arundel, who for ten years languished under sentence of death in the Tower of London, on account of his adherence to the See of Rome. On his death-bed he sent to beg Elizabeth to let him see his wife. She sent him back this cruel message: "If he will but once attend the Protestant service, he shall not only see his wife and children, but be restored to his honours and estates, with every mark of royal favour. Otherwise, no!"

Philip answered gently and with dignity: "Tell Her Highness I cannot accept her conditions. If my religion be the cause for which I suffer, sorry I am that I have but one life to lose."

The grandson of this illustrious confessor, Sir William Howard, married Mary, heiress of the Stafford estates, and the newly-wedded pair were created in 1639 Baron and Baroness de Stafford, with remainder to their heirs, male and female. In the following year Sir William was promoted to the rank of Viscount. He adhered to the Royal Cause throughout the Great Rebellion, and for eighteen years after the Restoration of Charles II. enjoyed the esteem which attaches to a blameless life. But, as Fenella tells us in *Peveril of the Peak*, "high and noble birth, honoured age and approved benevolence" could not save "the unfortunate Lord Stafford," when the perjured accuser of Catholic loyalty, Titus Oates, claimed to have brought

the viscount a papal commission, signed by Oliva, General of the Jesuits, and when two other malignant slanderers, Dugdale and Turberville, were found ready to swear that the gallant old Cavalier had hired them to assassinate his King.

"In truth, their testimonies did little weigh with me," notes Evelyn in his *Diary*; "and verily I am of His Lordship's opinion, 'Such testimony ought not to be taken against the life of a dog.'" But bigotry and panic were the order of the day, and the aged nobleman, before the Bar of the House of Lords, was found guilty of High Treason by a majority of twenty-four, among whom, to their disgrace, were four Howards, his own kinsmen! The death-sentence in all its revolting detail was pronounced, says Evelyn, "with frightful gravity. My Lord Stafford only gave their Lordships thanks, and, indeed, behaved himself modestly, and as became him."

The King, who had watched the trial with keen interest, and noted the absurdities and glaring discrepancies in the evidence, "had the weakness to consent to what he was at a loss to contend for, and reluctantly signed the death-warrant." Only he commuted the usual penalty for High Treason to simple beheadal, despite the peevish protest of Lord William Russell, who a few years later was himself granted the mitigation which he grudged to Stafford.

The Christian hero prepared himself calmly for death. In a letter to his wife he speaks with resigned emotion of "the great blessing which God was pleased to afford me in having you, not only for the great family to which you are the undoubted heir, and the estate which you brought me and mine, but for the great love which you have always borne me." His tender affection towards his "most deserving wife

and most dutiful children" is again referred to in a prayer which he composed during the brief interval between sentence and execution :

" But to show that I love Thy Divine Majesty more than them and my own life to boot, I willingly render up and forsake both for the love of Thee, and rather than offend Thee, though by the contrary I may have life and all worldly advantages, both for myself and them."

Among the most precious of the Costessey heirlooms is the jewel which glittered on the martyr's breast as he came forth to his death. It encloses the sacred monogram I.H.S. in very large table-cut diamonds, and has on the obverse the symbols of the Passion, delicately wrought in dark enamel.

On the scaffold, Stafford exhibited " none of those reluctances, convulsions, and agonies incident to persons in his condition," and his undaunted bearing gave many occasion to say : " Grace had left in him no resentments of nature." In a few simple, dignified words he bore witness to the Faith in and for which he died, and protested his innocence of the foul charges brought against him.

Then he knelt before the block, but refused to give the signal for his death. " Take your own time," he told the executioner.

And when the headsman asked, " Do you forgive me, my Lord ?" his last words were an emphatic : " I do."

" The crowd made no acclamation at the sight of my Lord's blood-dripping head, nor seemed much taken with the jollity of the spectacle." From that 29th day of December, 1680, English juries could, with safety to themselves, give verdicts in accordance with right reason and conscience where Catholics were con-



cerned, and Oates and Bedloe found their occupation gone.

James II. made what poor amends he could by raising the martyr's widow to the rank of Countess. She died in 1693, and lies buried in St. Edmund's Chapel, Westminster Abbey, close to the low altar-tomb of her ancestress, Eleanor de Bohun, Duchess of Gloucester.

There are other names in Laura's pedigree—Foster, Wilford, Southcote, Plowden—recalling Catholic gentry, illustrious in their constancy to the Faith.

Ursula Foster, of Tong Castle, Salop, for instance, died in Shrewsbury Gaol in 1590, "having there worn irons, very much misused by the Keeper, and not an hour before her death threatened with the dungeon." Her daughter Isabel lived disguised in the Stafford household, until in 1595 "Lord Stafford married his mother's chambermaid," the first *mésalliance* in the family, and one to be proud of.

Another worthy ancestor was Serjeant Plowden, whom Elizabeth offered to make her Chancellor.

"Hold me, dread Sovereign, excused," he wrote in reply. "Your Majesty well knows I find no reason to swerve from the Catholic Faith in which you and I were brought up. I can never countenance the persecution of its professors. I should not have in charge Your Majesty's conscience one week, before I should incur your displeasure, if it should be Your Majesty's royal intent to continue the system of persecuting the retainers of the Catholic Faith."

Francis Plowden, a lineal descendant of the lawyer, was Controller of the Household of James II., before and after 1688; and his wife, a granddaughter of the Venerable Viscount, was Maid of Honour to Queen Mary Beatrice. Their daughter Mary, at the age of





LADY JERNINGHAM (NÉE PLOWDEN)

*From a painting by Opie*



four, had a naughty knack of getting the King to send for her every time she was in disgrace.

This is the Mary Plowden who afterwards married Sir George Jerningham of Costessey Hall. Eventually her son, Sir William, Laura's grandfather, became heir-at-law to the Stafford Howards, and laid claim to the barony in 1807.

Just at that time, however, there was surging over England a wave of bigotry which shipwrecked, on the Catholic question, the Ministry of All the Talents, and sent a strong majority of ultra-Protestants to the House of Commons. So the Jerningham petition remained some years in abeyance.

By 1818 a saner spirit prevailed in politics, and the first edition of Evelyn's *Diary* did somewhat to enlighten the British conscience as to the shameful treatment meted out to the martyred viscount. His descendants therefore were advised to urge the reversal of his attainder. Then, the filiation being clear, the barony would follow as a matter of course.

On the 24th of May, 1824, the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, called upon the House of Peers to unite with him in an "act of Justice," that would remove "the foulest blot in our history," by annulling the iniquitous sentence which had blighted the fair name of Stafford before sending him to the scaffold. Matters moved so quickly that, although an officious Scotsman stood aghast when Laura's father emphatically refused to "tak' the Sakkrament" as a necessary preliminary to its second reading, the Bill passed into law on the 17th of June.

The Lord Stafford *de jure* did not, of course, receive an official summons to attend the Coronation of George IV. He offered to lend the King the Constable's Staff, which his ancestors had carried before

the Edwards and Henrys on similar occasions, but the "First Gentleman in Europe" sent it back with a pretty message to the effect that he did not wish to see it in other hands, and could not possibly see it in worthier ones than those of its owner.

"Pleasant words are always sunshine," is Lady Jerningham's dry comment. "However, the Duke of Wellington, with another staff, was the High Constable for the day!" And if report speaks truly, he cut a ludicrous figure as Constable at the banquet in Westminster Hall.

In the following November, when the autumn tints are at their loveliest in Costessey Park, the Duke of Gloucester came down there for three days' shooting. He was the King's brother-in-law and favourite cousin, a great stickler for etiquette, and therefore known in the Royal Family as "Silly Billy." Lady Stafford's letters show that she looked upon the visit as an honour rather than a pleasure, and she notes minutely in her diary all the ceremonies proper to the occasion. No finger-glasses, of course, in the presence of a Hanoverian prince, lest a casual gesture might emphasize allusions to the King as referring to His Majesty "over the water." The omission was doubly essential in a house so redolent of Jacobite tradition.

Far less formal were the relations of the Jerninghams with the King's youngest brother, the Duke of Sussex, whose estate at Holkam was within easy reach of Costessey. The duke was even more favourably disposed towards Catholics than was his brother of Clarence.

Another valued friend was Dr. Bathurst, the Anglican Bishop of Norwich, to whose efforts on behalf of the down-trodden Catholics his grandson, Canon Bathurst, of Stone, used to attribute his own conversion and

vocation to the priesthood. Dr. Milner, when on pastoral tour, usually called on Dr. Bathurst. On one occasion, when he dined with him, he was much amused at his host's apology for setting before him nothing better than venison.

"We bishops, you know, must set an example of frugality."

Dr. Bathurst was at his post in Parliament, fighting gallantly for justice to Catholics, in the spring of 1822, when Georgina Jerningham fell ill, and needed constant medical attendance. The episcopal palace at Norwich was placed at her parents' disposal; and probably for the first time since the Reformation, the holy season of Lent was observed there in a truly Catholic spirit. Gina's "spasms" were at times intolerable, and she relieved their violence frequently by "beautiful but heart-rending" bursts of song. Those who have watched Sister Mary of St. Francis in illness tell us that she, too, had a habit of singing in moments of intense pain.

Lady Stafford ensconced herself in the palace with her sick child, and every day her husband and some of the children drove over from Costessey in a coach-and-four. For public opinion in East Anglia—thanks perhaps in part to the influence of Bishop Bathurst—allowed Catholic gentlemen in the neighbourhood to exceed the five-pound limit in horseflesh prescribed in the Penal Code. In other parts of the country, petty officials were less tolerant. Thus Mrs. Waterton, mother of the naturalist, had to sit nearly an hour by the wayside, because the scruples of a toll-keeper obliged her coachman to drive home for a team of bullocks.

To return to the Garden City. The whole family spent Holy Week at the palace, so as to follow the

liturgical offices in one or other of the two Catholic chapels in the town. There were long talks with their mother, as they walked with her along the cloisters of the magnificent cathedral, while she explained to them its architectural beauties, and recalled memories of its Catholic past. "The stones thereof have pleased Thy servants, and Thou shalt have pity on the earth thereof," is Lady Stafford's apt quotation from the Psalms for the benefit of her absent host. Just before her departure she sent to Costessey for a rare magnolia to set in the palace garden. She also arranged with her own hands a bed of exceptionally fragrant mignonne, just beneath the windows of the bishop's study.

## CHAPTER V

### THE REALITIES OF LIFE

“ Life is only bright when it proceedeth  
To a deeper, truer, holier life above :  
Human love is sweetest when it leadeth  
To a more sublime and perfect love.”

ALL who in the bitterness of recent bereavement have come for comfort to our dear Sister Mary of St. Francis can bear witness to her tactful performance of what Father Faber aptly calls “ the hardest of our works for God.” Intense as was her sympathy with all the minute details which give to every grief its own peculiar sting, she yet suffered no mourner to leave her presence unheartened by her words of virile tenderness, or unlifted towards the level of her own robust faith.

Here, again, the lessons learnt in the Catholic atmosphere of early childhood were to bring forth fruit a hundredfold in later life. For when death knit closer the Jerninghams in the bonds of a common sorrow, she never heard a note of anguish out of harmony with the Stafford motto, “ Abstulit qui dedit.”

The first gap in the family circle occurred before Laura had completed her tenth year. Her uncle, William Jerningham, had lived at The Cottage near the Hall longer than she could remember ; and his younger children, Frederick and Gertrude,\* were her

\* Afterwards Lady Blount.



constant playmates. Among other games, they never wearied of "Weddings" in the disused garret which had served as chapel in the penal days. Laura and Gertrude were always the brides, Frederick and Frank the grooms, while Willie acted as priest and Bella as bridesmaid.

But in 1819 these little cousins went to live, like the Bedingfelds, near Ghent, and late in the following year their father died suddenly at Dunkirk, on his way to join his family.

Owing to stress of weather, it was some weeks before the ship bringing his coffin to England could enter Yarmouth Harbour. Lady Stafford utilized the anxious interval to give the children, both in her own nursery and at the village school, a thoroughly Christian notion of the mystery of death, and a salutary insight into the consoling beauties of the funeral liturgy.

And now, on a cold wet evening, late in October, she stood with her daughters and little sons at one of the windows in the library, looking out over the dark patches of plantation, whose misty outlines were less dimly accentuated whenever the clouds drifted from before the watery moon. Soon a line of torches shimmered in the distance, and the hearse came in sight, followed by the gentlemen of the family, and a few friends on horseback. And then Laura, clinging tightly to her mother's hand, went down to take her place in the sad procession. Her three elder sisters followed in due order, each with a little one by her side.

Thus they entered the chapel, which was lit up as for Christmas night, but hung with black, and decorated with boughs of cypress and of yew. The family knelt in the front benches on either side of the coffin. The rest of the sacred building was crowded with neighbours and former servants—all of them personal



CHILDREN OF SIR W. JERNINGHAM, A.D. 1777

Edward (3), William (5), George (6), and Charlotte (7).



friends of the deceased. Lady Stafford was determined to find room for the school-children, so these fitted in as best they could on the dais usually reserved for the family and their guests.

After the impressive burial service had been duly chanted and the customary rites performed, the mourners went down into the vault, which had been well lit up for the occasion. Lady Stafford found "a consolation mixed with melancholy" in thus introducing her young children "to this last abode of our family."

November was always a devotional month at Costessey; but that year, as may be readily conjectured, the pious practices to benefit the dead increased in number and intensity.

In the early part of 1822, death was again busy among Laura's kinsfolk—death in its kindest Christian form; but in each case her loving little heart had to ache in sympathy with orphaned children.

In January it was her first cousin, Lady Petre, a charming young matron of twenty-five, who "died as she had lived, an angel resigned to the Will of God." She left behind her four little children, the youngest but a day old, the eldest able to write to Lady Bedingfeld by way of consolation:

"DEAR GRANDMAMMA,

"I learn my lessons every day, the same as my poor Mamma taught me.

"Your affectionate grandchild,

"MA. PETRE."

Lady Jerningham's condolences to the heart-broken mother breathe, in their robust tenderness, the very spirit of Sister Mary of St. Francis.

“ We *must* submit to the All-Powerful Hand of God, who chastens with mercy and gives even merit to our submission. . . . Pray remember how many look up to you for support and comfort. . . . You had the forming of her, and she will not now *begin* to be un-mindful of the good received.”

Shortly after Easter, Lady Stafford heard of the serious illness at Bath of her sister's husband, Mr. Hugo Smythe. Laura and the three little ones hung about their mother all day, as she made hurried arrangements for a journey across England to assist at his Christian death, whisper words of resignation to his widow, and encourage their only daughter, an affectionate girl of eighteen, “ to seek strength and consolation in prayer.”

She had to hasten back to Costessey, to be in time for the funeral of another brother-in-law, Edward Jerningham, the clever lawyer whose energy and talent for organization had rendered signal service in Catholic politics.

“ Ah, poor Edward !” said Bishop Milner to the chaplain, on his next visit to the Hall. “ If I thought, sir, that his spirit hovered about this vault, I would rise at midnight to commune with it.”

Lady Bedingfeld hurried over from Ghent to comfort her mother, and was amazed at her “ miraculous fortitude.” She wrote in her diary : “ Oh, what support is given to the miserable by the same Hand that inflicts the blow ! As far back as my memory carries me, Edward's health and welfare were the barometer of my mother's spirits ; and now I see her moving about calmly in those chambers of woe and desolation.”

For Edward's wife was to follow to the grave within the month, and Lady Jerningham's quiet ministrations were needed at the death-bed. And who but she was to mother the five little orphans ?

In the autumn Lord and Lady Stafford took their three eldest girls on a round of visits among their Catholic friends in the North of England. "Surely the spell of three will produce one husband, or Lancashire is not what it has been," is Lady Jerningham's sly comment. "There is a report that Lady Fitzgerald's son has proposed and been rejected, I do not know by which. Georgina is reckoned the handsomest of the three, which speaks beauty to be merely fancy."

In the following June she announces the fulfilment of her playful prophecy.

"Mr. Fraser, of Lovat, having been overlooked by Georgina, turned his artillery on Charlotte, who has had the good sense to encourage his notice."

The Frasers, a family of Norman origin, as the name betokens (Fraser = strawberry plant), are famous in Scottish annals—from Sir Simon, the "Fraser, flower of chivalry" who mounted the scaffold with Wallace, to Baron Simon of Lovat, who laid his head on the block for his share in the "Forty-Five." The bridegroom elect had succeeded to the Beaulieu Estate, with Beaufort Castle in Inverness, the unconfiscated portion of the Lovat lands. In 1837 he was created a peer of the United Kingdom, and twenty years later he was allowed to resume the Scottish barony. Lady Jerningham is careful to mention that he was a practical Catholic, his mother "having turned the tide of orthodoxy into the Fraser family."

The "Great Northern Match" was solemnized at Costessey in August, 1823. Lady Bedingfeld came from Ghent for the occasion; and fervent were her prayers for the future happiness of her young namesake as she recalled her own wedding at Costessey, twenty-eight years previously, when she found herself "transported from a station of obedience where she



dared command, to a post of authority where she just ventured to make requests."

After the nuptial Mass in the chapel at the Hall, the party drove off to the Protestant church in the village, where Bishop Bathurst was in readiness to officiate, as the Anglican rite was required at that period to make marriages valid in the eyes of the English law.

Of more importance in the development of Laura's character was her prolonged absence from home as the time approached for her First Communion. She prepared for this great event under the care of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, who had come over from Liège during the Revolution, and opened a boarding-school at New Hall in Essex, a spot redolent of historic memories.

The convent was an ancient Tudor mansion, the "Palace of Beaulieu" in fact, from which Henry VIII. dated so many of his decrees. It was the residence assigned to Princess Mary in 1532, and it supplied her with the quails and cucumbers which she presented to her stepmother, Queen Jane Seymour. Here, throughout the heretical reign of Edward VI., "the Lady Mary's Mass" was regularly celebrated in her private oratory, which was the scene of the Lady Jane Grey's flippant refusal to curtsy before the Blessed Sacrament. Queen Elizabeth, in her turn, sometimes visited at Beaulieu, and an Italian inscription, found there in her honour, is far more appropriate to the Mother of God, beneath whose image it may nowadays be read: "*En terra piu savia Regina. En Cielo la piu lucente Stella. Vergine Magnanima, Dotta, Divina, Leggiadra, Honesta e Bella.*"

New Hall Convent was highly spoken of in Catholic circles, and in 1822 achieved a certain notoriety outside



the Church, by a controversy in the *Edinburgh Review* concerning the well-authenticated miraculous cure of one of the nuns, through the prayers of the holy Hungarian priest, Prince von Hohenlohe-Waldenburg-Schillingsfürst.

An excellent spirit reigned among the pupils, who were fond of their mistresses and proud of their school.

"They cries when they comes," said a Chelmsford flyman, "but they cries twice as hard when they leaves."

Laura felt the parting from home less than might be conjectured. Her parents and grown-up sisters were in London—the Reversal of the Attainder was before the Lords that year—the boys were all at Oscott; and Isabella and Mademoiselle Darcour were boarding in the outquarters of the convent, where she could converse with them every day.

This pleasant little privilege did not deprive her of one of the great advantages of school life, the wholesome discipline of the playground, where mutual forbearance, frankness, and good-humour form an excellent preparation for the social intercourse of after-life. Laura must have looked very winsome in the summer uniform—pink during the week; white, with a broad blue sash, on Sundays and festivals. Her fondness for fun and her charming manner contributed not a little to her affectionate influence over her companions. One little anecdote has come down to us of her thoughtful delicacy for others.

Clara Segrave was one day called to the parlour to a friend of her family, a worthy country gentleman of good social standing, but dressed with more regard for convenience than for fashion, and whose manner, moreover, betokened a supreme indifference to the petty amenities of etiquette. To her horror she had

to show him over the place ; and the sensitive school-girl shrank a little from facing her companions at the next recreation, and running the gauntlet of their merry banter. But Laura, guessing her embarrassment, ran up to her at once, and by a series of discreet questions and tactful remarks, gave her an opportunity of making clear to the others that the departed guest was at least well connected.

In the class-room Laura easily held her own. She enjoyed her lessons, and her day at Costessey had been so well regulated that she did not find the routine irksome. Her singularly devout and recollected demeanour in chapel was a source of edification from the first ; and her mistresses, struck as Mademoiselle Darcour had been, by the blend of earnestness and vivacity in her disposition, could not but realize that God had special designs on the pious child.

Her love for the things of God increased, as a deeper knowledge of the dogmas of Holy Faith, and a more familiar acquaintance with the character of Our Blessed Lord strengthened her resolve to serve him fervently all her days. In the enthusiasm of her Convent surroundings, she began to cherish holy yearnings for a life of cloistered fidelity ; and she confided to the head-mistress, Mother Clifford, her wish to become a nun. This experienced religious prudently refrained from any encouraging comment, but advised Laura, in general terms, to pray for light to know, and grace to follow God's holy Will.

How the child put in practice Mother Clifford's advice may be gathered from her own words, when, as mistress of novices, she spoke on the subject of mortification.

" We all learnt it when we were preparing for our First Communion. For my own part, I can say that

I did a very great deal, though I was only thirteen and considered delicate. But not too delicate, they said, to practise self-denial."

If the happiness of a First Communion day be in any way proportioned to the thoroughness of the preparation, Laura must have enjoyed great interior sweetness on the Feast of Our Lady's Presentation, 1824, when she approached the Holy Table for the first time. Very soon afterwards Lady Stafford came herself to fetch her home, in good time to make ready for the Christmas festivities.

With the New Year, the efficacy of her resolutions was put to the test in the resumed routine of Costessey schoolroom; and Mademoiselle observed that her favourite pupil made more successful efforts to control her natural impetuosity. At this date, too, she seems to have formed the habit of setting apart some time for prayer in the middle of the day. Her mother and sisters often talked before her of the gaieties of the London Season, and were pleased to notice her marked indifference for the pleasures this world has to offer.

In the autumn she again made a brief stay at New Hall, to receive there, on the 8th of September, the Sacrament of Confirmation, at the hands of Dr. Poynter, Vicar Apostolic for the London District. This second visit served to deepen the good impression made by the first. All through life she kept a very warm corner in her heart for New Hall and its inmates.

One more grace was needed to anneal her soul against the "bewitching of trifling," before the time came for her début in fashionable circles. When she was sixteen, she had a severe attack of typhoid fever. In the weakness which followed the delirious phase of the malady, she remained for some days in a state of coma, and the doctors feared she would never rally. In this

extremity Lady Stafford vowed to take her beloved child on a pilgrimage to Holywell, should God see fit to restore her to health. Hardly had this promise passed her lips, when Laura smiled, as if awaking from a refreshing sleep, and—such is the force of habits inculcated in infancy—her first spontaneous movement was the Sign of the Cross.

Convalescence was exceptionally rapid ; and in a very short time she was strong enough to go with her parents to North Wales, and kneel with them in thanksgiving at the shrine of St. Winifred. This illness seems to have strengthened her constitution : her cheeks acquired a healthier tint, her eyes a brighter glow.

“ Every bit of my hair came off, and I had to wear a wig,” she said half a century later, when comparing experiences with a pupil at Namur, whom she had watched with a mother’s tenderness through a similar illness.

The girl was not wanting in imagination, but her utmost efforts failed to associate anything so artificial as a wig with one so straightforward as Sister Mary of St. Francis.



HON. LAURA STAFFORD-JERNINGHAM

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## CHAPTER VI

1829

“A good wife is Heaven’s last and best gift to man, his angel and minister of graces innumerable, his gem of many virtues, his casket of jewels. Her voice his sweetest music, her smiles his brightest day . . . her industry his surest wealth, her economy his safest steward, her lips his faithful counsellor, and her prayers the ablest advocate of Heaven’s blessings on his head.”—JEREMY TAYLOR.

As the time drew near for Laura’s introduction into Society, she paid some prolonged visits to the Pitchfords in Bromley. That she was an appreciated guest we may gather from the reminiscences of the eldest daughter, then an intelligent child of eight.

“I first remember Laura Jerningham as a beautiful, merry girl, overflowing with kindness and generosity, who played with us on the lawn at Costessey, and whose presents were long the pride and delight of our nursery. When she was old enough to be introduced into Society, Lady Stafford asked my mother to choose her trousseau, and she came to us at Bromley, with her sister Isabella and their excellent governess, Mademoiselle Darcour. I was allowed to join all the shopping excursions to London. Very few young ladies could have shown less vanity about dress, and I was much struck by her submission in all ways to my mother’s taste. Her brother George was in London, and often came down



to see his sisters. He was very agreeable and lively, and amused us much over the ceremonies of hair-dressing, as performed by a fashionable London hair-dresser, who was teaching Miss Jerningham's maid the different styles then in vogue.

" Laura Jerningham was very beautiful and amiable, and she always remained our type of the perfection of a young lady, both in appearance and character. She edified the elders greatly by her piety, and we children noticed how regular she was in retiring during part of the day for her devotions. Her sister Isabella was devoted to her, and in great grief at the prospect of losing her from the schoolroom. She was, I think, scarcely eighteen when she 'came out,' and was more admired than any of her sisters in Society; though my mother always insisted that she was not at all equal in beauty to her eldest sister, Lady Lovat. For myself, I think I have never seen any girl more beautiful."

It will be seen from the above that Laura remained faithful to the pious practices adopted at New Hall. But she seems for the time to have quite put aside the idea of a religious vocation. She thoroughly enjoyed her first London Season, and before its close had consented to become the wife of the Hon. Edward Petre, uncle to the head of that time-honoured Catholic family, and nephew to Bernard, twelfth Duke of Norfolk.

It seemed a brilliant marriage from a worldly point of view. Mr. Petre was reported to be in very affluent circumstances. He had a town house in Chelsea—at that time one of the fashionable quarters of London—and a group of estates on the Yorkshire coalfield, in the vicinity of Pontefract, Doncaster, and York. At Stapleton Park, his beautiful home near Pontefract,

he dispensed hospitality during great part of the year. He was very fond of horses and a great favourite in sporting circles.

Although, according to British Statute, no Papist was supposed to own a horse over five pounds in value, Mr. Petre's "Rowton" and "Matilda" closed the Penal Period by carrying off the St. Leger Stakes in 1827 and 1828; and in the following year "The Colonel," another of the Stapleton stud, inaugurated the new era of Emancipation by galloping first to the winning-post.

There were other and more solid advantages which induced Laura's parents to look favourably on the proposed alliance. Mr. Petre was a practical Catholic, high-principled and honourable—kind-hearted, too, to a fault. Moreover, he was an excellent son; and this circumstance may have had its weight with Lady Stafford, who had known Lady Petre from girlhood, and usually refers to her in her writings as "my dear little mother." Wherever he went, he was an immense favourite with little children, and always ready to share in their fun. Indeed, the story goes that Laura first won his affections when she was but five years old.

"That is the girl of my heart! I will wait for her as long as you like," he said to Lord Stafford, as together they stood watching her gambols on the lawn at Costessey. And nobody felt surprise when, in the fulness of time, the jesting proposal was reiterated in eager earnest, and Laura's eighteenth birthday found her affianced to a man nearly twice her age, and for whom she experienced merely a kindly esteem, which the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony was to ripen into a calm and steady affection.

From the Jerningham point of view, the tender

passion was a mere accessory to weddings—just the icing of the bride-cake, according to Lady Bedingfeld's graphic metaphor.

"All marriages, however happy, become in a few years devoid of passion. But affection and esteem remain, and give more calm and content to the heart than the first feelings. There cannot therefore be any objection to beginning with such a certain though dispassionate foundation. It is only eating a plum-cake which has not been iced with sugar. We have to do it sooner or later, however thick the tempting ingredient may have been laid on."—*House of Letters*.

So it is not surprising that Laura, trained from infancy to trust to her parents' superior judgment, should heartily acquiesce in the plans which they deemed conducive to her future happiness. It is less easy to understand why Lady Stafford was so anxious to see this beautiful, inexperienced child pass swiftly from the schoolroom to the responsibilities of matronhood. Her conduct seems all the more puzzling when we recall her own sensible words written a few years previously.

"I think the girls had as well see handsome heroes before they settle as after, considering the few good-looking people among the Apostolic tribe."—*Jerningham Letters*.

Perhaps she feared that a mixed marriage was not such an improbable contingency, now that Catholics were on a more equal footing as to citizenship with the rest of Britons. Perhaps, too, she feared a revival of Laura's early attraction to the religious life. Indeed, the political status of nuns was sufficiently precarious to make prudent parents look askance at signs of a vocation to cloistered perfection on the part of their children. For be it borne in mind that the

"Bill for the Relief of Roman Catholics," to which George IV. affixed his signature "with great reluctance" on the 13th of April, 1829, has a group of clauses, with this formidable preamble, as a sop to the Non-conformist Conscience of the day :

"Whereas Jesuits and members of other Religious Orders, Communities, or Societies of the Church of Rome, bound by monastic vows, are resident in the United Kingdom, and it is expedient to make provision for the gradual suppression of the same therein," etc.

But though a happy marriage, such as her own, was ever the goal of Lady Stafford's maternal ambition, she knew her duty too well, and was too conscientious in its performance, to attempt to coerce her children's inclinations. The twins were not censured for neglecting suitors eligible from their mother's point of view. Nor can we readily imagine that Laura, with her straightforward good sense and strength of will, could have been coaxed or driven into a marriage repugnant to her feelings. She owned, in later life, that her parents had indeed selected the bridegroom, but added frankly that she was quite free to say *no*, and would have said it if she had not cared for him very much. "*J'aimais beaucoup mon mari*," were her actual words.

So, perfectly certain that obedience to her parents in this matter was right and pleasing in the sight of God, she utilized the short time at her disposal to fit herself by prayer and prudent counsel for the duties of this new phase of her life. The religious yearnings of childhood were to remain dormant for a time, since Divine Providence willed her to lead, for nigh upon twenty years, a life of Christian perfection in the world, preparing, albeit unconsciously, for the wider

sphere of usefulness which was to engross the second half of her earthly career.

The death of "Her Most Catholic Majesty" in 1826 practically terminates the correspondence published in the *Jerningham Letters*, so we have very meagre data of the events affecting the Costessey household during the interesting years immediately preceding Emancipation. However, there remain to us a few unprinted letters of the spring of 1829.

On New Year's Day, Lady Stafford informs her friends at Bromley that Clan Fraser is rejoicing and lighting bonfires, because an heir is born to the Lovats for the first time in two hundred years. She also asks prayers "against perils of soul and body" for her youngest son Frank, "an intrepid boy with the mildest and most gentle temper," who has just sailed as midshipman with Captain Fitzclarence in H.M.S. *Pallas*, "under sealed orders to be opened south-west of Scilly."

Edward, her second son, a captain in the Dragoon Guards, had married in the previous June, Marianne Smythe, niece and namesake of Mrs. Fitzherbert, and a daughter was born to them just before the passing of the Act of Emancipation.

There was another wedding in the family during that hopeful springtime: Henry Valentine, Lord Stafford's heir, married Julia Howard, a niece of Mr. Petre. And on July 21, despite the adage, "Thrice a bridesmaid never a bride," Laura herself came back from the altar, determined to live her new life in the spirit of her husband's family motto, "Sans Dieu rien."

We find allusions to these events—so slight as scarce to warrant the digression—in letters hitherto unpublished, which, because of their historic interest, we cannot refrain from inserting, almost in their entirety.





LADY JERNINGHAM (HON. FRANCES LEE-DILLON), ÆT. 52

*From a painting by Opie*

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*H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex to Mrs. Fitzherbert.*

" KENSINGTON PALACE,

" April 11th, 1829.

" DEAR MRS. FITZ,

" I must be the first to offer you my congratulations, and to give you the result of our efforts.

" At two we divided—149 in the House for it, and 64 proxies, making 213 votes, against 76 present ; and 33 proxies, making 109 votes against the question. Consequently we carried it by a majority of 104.

" Thus, my dear Friend, this great and important question is set at rest ; and God be praised that I have assisted in so good a cause ! My heart feels so much lighter ! I cannot tell you what I have undergone the whole of the time both from anxiety of mind and fatigue of body.

" My good and devoted old Bishop [Bathurst of Norwich], though going fast, I am sorry to say, leaned on my arm and walked into the Division lobby. ' Now,' says he, ' I can die in peace.' He was quite delightful, and answered Lord Eldon most beautifully, with a vivacity quite astonishing, and very gratifying it was !

" The Duke of Cumberland declared his opposition to the measure, and that *he withdrew from henceforth* his support from Government. *I answered him !* Not having seen a newspaper yet, I cannot say whether it is well given ; but I was told that it was done with effect. Thus, my dear Friend, I have fought a good fight, and my reward is participating gratefully, not arrogantly, in the consolation of doing justice to my father's subjects, and thinking that at least some few hours have been usefully spent.

" Will you write all this to Lady Stafford ? I am too fatigued to do it myself.

"I hope at Windsor *they will be pleased!* It will remove *many difficulties*, and such a majority not only must have astonished, but is *an answer*, to everything:

"Now God bless you, my dear Mrs. Fitz. If I can, I will give you a call and congratulate you. I have a great many visits to make, but I will manage so as to see you in the course of the day.

"I hope your dear little patient [Mrs. Edward Jerningham] is going on well.

"Very sincerely and devotedly,

"Your friend,

"AUGUSTUS FREDERICK."

*H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex to Lady Stafford.*

"MY DEAR MADAM,

"April 16th, 1829.

"Although overwhelmed with business and fatigue, I cannot resist the gratification of being one of the first to congratulate you on our triumph on Saturday last. Never were my feelings more excited nor my heart more full. The gratification of finding opinions, for which I have contended for so many years, at last admitted to be the righteous and the best by such a majority as we have had, is indeed a blessing, the only reward as a humble individual, which I am anxious to obtain. I have got that, and God be praised!

"My dear Madam, I do rejoice with you on our success. I do hope that as soon as Lord Stafford can take his seat *he will do so*. If it is worth having, *the sooner it is got the better*; and the stronger will be the demonstration of gratitude by profiting of the Act of Justice as soon as it is conceded.

"I am happy to hear that the new-married couple

are with your Ladyship. I congratulate you likewise on your second son having presented you with a granddaughter.

“With many kind regards to my friend Lord Stafford, believe me, dear Madam, with great sincerity,

“Your Ladyship’s

“Obliged and devoted

“AUGUSTUS FREDERICK.”

## CHAPTER VII

“SANS DIEU RIEN”\*

“She never found fault with you, never implied  
You wrong by her right. And yet men by her side  
Grew nobler, girls purer, as thro’ the whole town  
The children were gladder who tugged at her gown.  
None knelt at her feet, confessed lovers in thrall :  
They knelt more to God than before, that was all !  
If you praised her as charming, some asked what you meant ;  
But the charm of her presence was felt when she went.”

E. B. BROWNING.

IN a confidential chat with Sister Mary of St. Francis, a young girl just leaving school expressed her pre-conceived dislike for the conventionalities and gaities of Modern Society. The frank avowal elicited a smile, half amused, half reminiscent, and the remark delivered in a deliberate and humorous tone :

“Ah, my dear, admiration is a very pleasant thing !”

And certainly Laura Petre could speak from wide and varied personal experience. Hitherto we have watched her grow up unobtrusively, one of a dozen, and attracting the minimum of notice which usually falls to the lot of children occupying a middle position between the eldest and youngest of a large family. Now she has entered a new phase of existence, introduced to the world of fashion by a husband who, whatever were his failings, loved and trusted her completely throughout the nineteen years of their married life.

\* Petre motto.

"Mr. Petre idolized his lady," one of their servants tells us. "He worshipped the very ground she walked on."

And she in her turn impressed their circle of friends by her affectionate and amiable submission to his wishes, and the good-humoured alacrity with which, when no principle was at stake, she sacrificed her tastes and inclinations to fit in with her new surroundings.

Her extremely youthful appearance somewhat exaggerated the difference in age between them, and when we examine the portraits painted about the time of their wedding, we can better understand the playful allusions among her intimates to "Laura's old husband." Very sweet and winsome she looks, this girlish bride of eighteen, as she smiles on us from the canvas at Costessey "with a timid glance," suggestive in its pensive frankness of Longfellow's stanzas on "Maidenhood":

"In thy heart the dew of youth,  
On thy lips the smile of truth.  
Oh! that dew, like balm, shall steal  
Into wounds that cannot heal. . . .  
And that smile, like sunshine, dart  
Into many a sunless heart,  
For a smile of God thou art."

Lady Malet, Brougham's stepdaughter, was of opinion that another good portrait of her exists in Angelica Kaufmann's picture of "The Virtues."

"In the foreground, with a large red scarf wound about her, there is a beautiful figure of Charity, fondling little children and playing with them. The face of this figure is exceedingly like Mrs. Petre."

We subjoin a few more of this lady's remarks, as illustrating the good impression made by Laura on her non-Catholic friends.

“ When I first met Mrs. Petre, she was in all her youth and great beauty, admired and liked, too, by all who knew her. Her sisters were nice people, so perfectly simple and unaffected ; but she was the pearl of her family and unique. She had naturally a great deal of what the French call *enjouement*, an untranslatable mixture of fun, gaiety, and goodness. I preserve the most profound impression of her noble character, her self-abnegation, and her tolerance and enduring kindness to myself. She took me as I was, and never by a word attempted to make me any other ; though, from her point of view, my dear Laura must often have wished to do so. Mrs. Petre was altogether a very superior character, and if anyone is to be canonized as a saint, she ought to be. She went out a great deal with her husband, and seemed at the time amused with her life and the general admiration she met.”

In point of fact, Laura fulfilled her social obligations with her usual whole-heartedness. The keen eyes of childhood had noticed her indifference to dress, at a time when she was staying in London expressly to choose her outfit. But she knew the styles and blends of colour that suited her face and figure, and the textures and adornments pleasing to her husband's taste and appropriate to their social position. “ Magnificent in her diamonds ” is a phrase recurring in the descriptions of her appearance at this period. Yet her servants, not the least enthusiastic among her eulogists, noted that a crucifix was always on her dressing-table, and that she employed the time in some useful occupation while Kitty's fingers were busy among her luxuriant tresses.

Thanks to the lavish creation of peers by Pitt and by George IV., as a cheap means of rewarding services, meritorious or otherwise, Mrs. Petre sometimes came





HON. LAURA PETRE

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across people who were noblemen before they were gentlemen;\* and among the very large circle of her husband's friends in his bachelor days there were some whom she had to receive graciously, and at the same time keep at a distance with sweetbrier dignity. On such occasions she derived comfort from the maxim she was fond of repeating in after-life.

“We have to suffer in our dealings with human beings, in order to deserve the happiness of conversing eternally with the angels.”

Mr. Petre had friends of another stamp, and his political connections procured her the intimate acquaintance of some of the most eminent men of the day. In congenial society, says Canon Doyle, “Laura laughed heartily but spoke little. Everyone liked to listen to her sensible remarks, and her opinions were usually correct. Her prudence and modesty equalled her wit; and Protestants and Catholics alike respected her as the embodiment of Christian wisdom. She had, moreover, a wonderful business capacity, and a remarkable cheerfulness—evidently the outcome of the pleasure she felt in making others happy. But reticence and discretion were her strong point. One is usually glad when a woman stops talking, but Laura spoke so little and so to the point, that clever men liked to listen to her.”

As soon as “the symbol of our saving grace” had ceased to be “the key to office” in the guise of a blasphemous oath, Mr. Petre was chosen Mayor of York, and fulfilled his duties to the satisfaction of the citizens throughout the historic year 1830. In the autumn came the General Election, which sent to power a Cabinet pledged to carry the much-needed

\* In 1793 Laura's great-uncle, Viscount Dillon, refused an earldom, “not to be the last of many whom he had seen before they were even reputed gentlemen.”

measure of Parliamentary reform. In ordinary times the great constituencies chose representatives connected by birth or interest with the leading landowners. A contest for even a small county was so expensive that only rich men could afford to present themselves as Candidates, as what were beginning to be known as "Liberal" opinions seldom found favour with the local magnates. Under these conditions it is not surprising that Brougham, a lawyer without Yorkshire connections or land in Yorkshire, could write retrospectively towards the close of his career :

"My return for the great County of York was my greatest victory, my most unsullied success. Without hyperbole I may say that it was the proudest moment of my life when as Knight of the Shire I was begirt with the sword. The Evangelical Church was dead against me . . . but my landed friends wanted me, and my efforts against slavery secured me the partisans of Wilberforce and those religious sects who had been Wilberforce's main strength."

Catholics at that period looked on the Whigs as their political friends, and were, moreover, grateful to Brougham for his persistent and effective support of their claims. Mr. Petre, in particular, used his immense local influence in his behalf, and it was probably during the three weeks' hard canvassing in the autumn of 1830 that the great lawyer conceived a genuine and lasting admiration for the gracious and sterling qualities of the youthful Mayoress of York.

Brougham had not much time for social amenities during the next four years. To keep down the arrears in Chancery he rarely went out save to Cabinet dinners.

"I am never in bed till two," he wrote, "and up again early, with a man copying, while I correct what I wrote overnight. I dine at half-past five, and am

at work sometimes in half an hour. At dinner even, I have letters to write. If I relax my work, Appeals become crowded in the Lords.”

Yet he managed to put in an appearance at those gatherings where he was likely to meet Laura, and laid himself out to be agreeable when in her company. He found in her a sympathetic and appreciative listener, and she in her turn was amused and benefited by the brilliant conversation of the versatile Chancellor, concerning whom it has been wittily remarked :

“He entered Parliament in 1810, kept silence for ten months, and talked ever after.”

Perhaps from his lips she learnt the practice which proved such a valuable business asset throughout her religious life :

“The chief in a department must delegate as much as possible to the best agents possible, else he will be tormented to death and do his work ill. The best man of business is he who does least with his own hands, and most through good agents. This is a cardinal rule. My principle always was to be most careful in my selection, and then to give the persons chosen my entire confidence, calling on them to do the same, each in his own branch.”

There were other points about Brougham with which she was in hearty sympathy : his struggles in behalf of civil and religious liberty ; his whole-hearted championship of the oppressed, whether negro, Catholic, or Queen-Consort ; and, above all, his lifelong endeavour to promote the diffusion of knowledge, and the spread of instruction among the lower classes in the British Isles. As far back as 1820 he introduced a Bill, the first of its kind, for the establishment of elementary schools in every parish in England. “The measure had the full support of the Anglican clergy,” he tells

us, "but I was prevented from carrying it by the absurd and groundless prejudices of the Dissenters."

During his four years as Chancellor, however, he and his colleagues succeeded in getting two important measures through Parliament. The National System of Education for Ireland, after amicable discussion between the two primates, Archbishop Murray and Archbishop Whateley, received the assent of the Legislature in 1832; and the first Parliamentary grant in aid of Poor Schools in Great Britain formed an item in the Budget of the following years.

It was a great advantage to Laura and her husband to exchange ideas with Brougham on this his favourite topic. To Mr. Petre in particular, it opened out a sphere of usefulness for which he was specially fitted by social position, urbanity, and power of organization. From this period may be dated the strenuous and unremitting endeavours in behalf of Catholic education which constitute his chief claim to our gratitude.

Laura had smiles and bright sympathy for other prominent members of the Grey Cabinet. She was attracted to Lord Althorp, perhaps because his shy, reserved nature stood in need of kind words of encouragement to counteract what Brougham terms "his painfully ludicrous modesty, his habit of undervaluing himself, so that he never could understand why he had attained to so high a position in public life." Perhaps, too, she was anxious to soften or completely allay whatever animosity he might just then be feeling against Catholics. For his younger brother, the Hon. George Spencer, was "a hot convert whose zeal at times outran his discretion," and his relations were naturally mortified at the notoriety he was attracting to their name. Perhaps it was thanks



to Laura's judicious tact that Althorp persuaded his father to make arrangements with Bishop Bramstone, enabling the future Passionist to pursue his ecclesiastical studies in Rome.

We must not omit to include among Mrs. Petre's circle of intimates a tall dark man, close upon fifty, always dressed in the height of fashion, and supposed to be so vain of his personal appearance that the *Times* had fastened on him the sobriquet of “Cupid.” This was Viscount Palmerston, head of the Foreign Office and a great authority on racing matters. He enjoyed good conversation, liked it all the better for being enlivened by fancy and fun, and listened as well as talked. He was a purist in English, as the clerks in his department knew to their cost; but there was little to make him wince in Laura's choice of words. Perhaps, too, he recognized in the wife of his old friend qualities akin to his own, especially that “habit of accurate investigation which gives the mind a power of close and rapid generalization, because it always works on secure materials.”—*Edinburgh Review*, 1865.

There were many topics upon which they did not see eye to eye. But Laura, who never supposed she understood any matter, great or small, till she had taken pains to view it in all its aspects, found it no small advantage to exchange ideas with Palmerston on subjects about which they agreed to differ, and to listen to his shrewd remarks on men and current events. She enjoyed his conversation all the more that—

“The arrows of his wit, if they were keen,  
Yet were clean  
Of the venom of a sneer begot in spleen.”

In 1830 Palmerston was much occupied with the Revolution in Brussels which dissolved the ill-assorted

union between Belgium and Holland. The Belgians love their liberty, and they love their religion even more. In the sixteenth century they deliberately preferred Spanish tyranny to Dutch Calvinism. In 1789 they shook off their allegiance to Joseph II. of Austria, when, not content with regulating the number of tapers to be burnt in their churches, he presumed to tamper with the dogmatic instruction given in their schools. The grievances in 1830 were no less real, and called for a like redress. Their effective assertion of Independence has been pithily justified in Palmerston's own words :

" Their religion has been interfered with, the education of their children taken out of their hands, taxes imposed on them which they thought illegal, and their native language forbidden in lawsuits and in Courts of Justice."

And so it came about that one day, when the Petres were dining with Lord Palmerston, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, told Laura he had just been offered the Crown of Belgium, and asked her opinion as to whether he should accept or decline. She advised him to accept, and spoke so sensibly of the people he was called to govern (among whom her cousins, the William Jerninghams and the Bedingfelds, had spent happy years), that we may well believe her words had some influence on his decision.

Laura was afterwards an appreciated guest at the Court of Laeken, and at a much later date we shall meet Leopold again in the convent parlour at Namur, chatting pleasantly with her of old friends in his English days, and of his plans for the welfare of the nation whose choice he justified throughout a long and prosperous reign.

Laura's sunny disposition and perfect health enabled



her to enjoy her life to the full. She made time, too, for plenty of reading ; her note-books contain extracts from scientific writings of the day and from works bearing on political science and philanthropy. Only one novel is quoted, Macaulay's friend, Clarissa Harlowe ; but history is still the favourite subject, and she seems to have been interested in books on Russia—a country made fashionable in London just then by the genial qualities of its charming Ambassador, the Princess de Lieven.

The adulation Laura met with in Society did not abate her zest for the simple pleasures of her girlhood. Old friends were not neglected, and in visiting these she could hardly wait for the carriage to stop, but bounded up the steps with the lightsome eagerness of former days, often to be met at the top with the laughing reproof :

" Laura ! Where's your husband ?"

" He is coming," she would answer, " puffing and blowing, half a mile behind me, as usual."

And when he did arrive on the scene it was pretty to witness with what affectionate solicitude she saw to it that he was at once made thoroughly comfortable.

The Petres went very often to Costessey during the first years of their wedded life. Here Laura took up again her old interests, moving as happily among cottagers as among Cabinet Ministers—more happily, in fact, for in the country she came oftener in contact with little children.

" How are you, my little lamb ?" was her usual form of greeting, and the ailing among them were her special pets.

In the autumn of 1831 her Bromley friends were at Costessey with three of their children. It was a joyous time for the little ones, with Mrs. Petre ever ready to

swing them in the rocking-boat on the lawn, or to initiate them into the varied amusements of country life. The eldest child, a girl of eleven, has left some details of the visit.

“ We were very happy in the schoolroom with Mademoiselle Darcour, who was kindness itself, and Isabella, then a handsome girl of sixteen. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Petre were staying at the Park, and in consequence we were allowed to dine at the late dinner, while they remained. Mr. Petre was a most good-natured man, and had merry games with the children, even in the select circle of the drawing-room. Mrs. Petre was just the same as ever, but had grown stouter. When I was ill for a day or two, she used to sit with me and bring me pretty presents. Lady Stafford, too, was most kind. She used to tuck me up at night and make my bed comfortable, breathing prayers over me the while.

“ It was a most interesting time at Cossey. The fine new buildings were on the point of being completed. Some of the rooms were full of curiosities, stained glass and suits of armour, etc. The delight of exploring these was unending. Mr. Buckler, the architect, was there part of the time, and his interesting explanations gave us our first ideas of architecture. A million heraldic bricks, all made on the estate, had gone into the Central Tower alone. Then there were very curious ornamental chimneys, no two alike, illustrating different Tudor styles.

“ Though I was so young, I enjoyed listening to the conversation at meals and in the evenings. Lady Stafford had been for the first time at a Coronation—that of William IV. and Queen Adelaide. She was greatly struck by the effect of the Peers and Peeresses putting on their coronets simultaneously as soon as



CHAPEL OF ST. AUGUSTINE, COSTESSEY HALL



the King was crowned. (I heard *she* had done it so well, with such grace and dignity.) She said the sudden flash of light on all the jewels reminded her of the Just assuming their crowns on the Last Day.

“There were many stirring events at the time: for instance, the Reform Riots, in which she and one of her daughters were surrounded by a mob in London, and greeted with cheers when it was found their carriage belonged to a Liberal Peer. She had seen the famous kneeling of Lord Brougham on the Woolsack, and discussed and described the great speakers. I am often reminded of these conversations when I read the memoirs of that period.

“But more striking than all was the religious tone which predominated. The delightful chapel, reached from the great dining-room by a long corridor, the daily Mass, the devotional services, and the piety of the family made a deep impression on me, which has never been obliterated. The Feasts of All Saints and All Souls occurred while we were there, and the conversations on the different ceremonies served to strengthen this impression, and awakened probably some of my first ideas of the beauties of liturgical solemnity.

“Mr. and Mrs. Edward Petre left for Yorkshire while we were at Cossey. It was a sad parting, deeply felt on both sides. When they had driven away, and the family had dispersed, I saw, through the long corridor, Lady Stafford still standing in tears at the hall door, looking long at the way they had gone. It struck me much at the time. Could she but have had a glimpse of the future, and seen that, after many sorrows and separations, “beloved Laura” would be the instrument of Providence for the spread of religious education all over England, and the salvation of hundreds and thousands!”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE USES OF ADVERSITY

“ Though losses and crosses  
Be lessons right severe,  
There’s wit there  
You’ll get there  
You’ll find no other where.”  
BURNS.

MEANWHILE the cholera paid its first recorded visit to our shores ; and on the 6th of November, 1831, while Laura was drinking in deep draughts of the keen and bracing Norfolk air, amid the autumnal glories of the Costessey woods, intercession was appointed to be made in all the churches and chapels throughout the land :

“ Lord, turn away from us this grievous calamity, against which our only security is in Thy Compassion !”

The panic brought out what is best and worst in human nature. Many of the rich, having bought in a large stock of provisions, sent away their servants and shut themselves up in selfish seclusion. Others, laying aside for the nonce the disputes and animosities arising out of the Reform Bill, consulted together how best to minimize the ravages and restrict the area of the fell disease. The men in power realized that ignorance of the laws of sanitation was in great measure responsible for the spread of the contagion. A Board



of Health was established by statute, and Lords Brougham and Althorp started a "Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge."

Another of Laura's valued friends made himself conspicuous, even among the devoted ranks of the Catholic clergy, by his Christ-like charity to the cholera victims, irrespective of creed. This was the Rev. Thomas Doyle—"Father Thomas" he was affectionately called—the hardworking young priest attached to the secluded Belgian Chapel in the London Road. His district extended along the Thames as far as Gravesend, and comprised crowded courts and loathsome alleys, down which no policeman dared venture single-handed, even in broad daylight.

In these foul hotbeds of disease the zealous priest found full scope for his devotedness during the terrible years 1831-1833. He fearlessly inhaled the pestiferous atmosphere of the squalid tenements, ministering night and day to the bodily wants of the victims, raising his hand in priestly absolution above the dying members of his own flock, and suggesting thoughts of loving hope and contrition to the non-Catholics who cried out to him, and not in vain, to ease their death-beds and prepare them to meet their Judge. He did not leave the disfigured corpse till it was decently arranged for burial, although in many instances he found it necessary to lift it himself into the coffin. Nor did his labours cease at the graveside, for there were widows to assist and orphans to educate, as well as medicine and strengthening food to supply to the convalescent. He had not much leisure to beg, but his friends helped him generously with money and gifts. The Duchess of Kent, Queen Victoria's mother, headed the list with a princely donation when the *Times* opened a subscription in its columns, "in aid of the Rev. Mr. Doyle."

The poor suffered most during those terrible years, as insanitary surroundings and lack of proper food predisposed them to take infection. Many of the well-to-do could isolate themselves in selfish security, but Mr. Petre was not one to shirk his duty to his fellow-citizens in this cowardly fashion. As the result of his charitable exertions, he himself was prostrated by the disease, and his dutiful young wife nursed him tenderly and intelligently through all its stages. Her sunny tact and even temper, as well as her firmness in enforcing obedience to the doctor's orders, made her services invaluable in the sick-room; and her perfect fearlessness proved her best preservative against infection. During those anxious days she stored up in her retentive memory information that might be useful in like contingencies, and thirty years later, as we shall see, the knowledge thus painfully acquired was turned to good account.

Among the heart-rending experiences of the time must be reckoned Laura's grief at the misery around her which she was powerless to alleviate: breadwinners stricken down, leaving in utter destitution the aged and infirm dependent upon them, and, sadder still, parents whose death-beds were embittered by the dread lest their orphaned children should grow up in ignorance, nay, in hatred, of the doctrines and practice of the Catholic Faith. True, she could plead for them among her moneyed acquaintance; but she found herself just then awkwardly situated as regards expenditure, and dared not follow the dictates of her heart in the matter of almsgiving.

Mr. Petre owned a considerable amount of landed property—exactly how much it is impossible to say—for, besides his Yorkshire inheritance, he was accustomed to buy up small holdings in different parts of

the country for electoral purposes, or for the convenience of friends. He was not very particular about securing the title-deeds, and often these little transactions passed out of his mind with the occasion. He was unbusiness-like in other ways: the entire management of his property was entrusted to stewards, and the lavish and reckless footing upon which his household had been conducted in his bachelor days made his annual expenditure larger than was warranted by his income. Moreover, he was open-handed, contributing liberally to every pious and charitable undertaking that was brought to his notice, and so obliging that he was as willing to assist friends in pecuniary difficulties as the money-lenders were to accept bonds on his security. And so it came about that, although reputed a wealthy man, Mr. Petre was at the date of his marriage practically ruined, with a vague idea that his affairs were in rather a confused condition, and that retrenchment in some shape was, to say the least, advisable.

He made a good beginning by selling his racing stud—perhaps Lord Stafford had made this a condition of his marriage with Laura. But more than this was needed to retrieve his shattered finances, and it was not long before his creditors became pressing for a speedy adjustment of their claims. Mr. Petre felt powerless to grapple with the position; but he had the good sense to acknowledge his business limitations; and by the time his young wife was twenty-one years of age, he was only too thankful to leave everything to her discretion.

Laura put her whole mind on the dreary and distasteful task before her. She never signed a document till she had mastered its contents in minute detail; and Mr. Edward White, her husband's solicitor, soon conceived a hearty admiration for her intelligent

grasp of legal intricacies. He spared no pains in developing this business capacity, her "lawyer's head" as he called it, and became in consequence as long as he lived her friend and trusted adviser.

Some of the estates were sold, as well as the furniture of Stapleton Park ; the rest of the property was placed in the hands of administrators, who were to control it till all debts were discharged ; and, with the concurrence of her trustees, the Duke of Norfolk and Lord Petre, Laura became her husband's creditor, within the limits of her marriage settlement. The mortgages thus acquired are noted in her private memoranda as "fictitious debts" ; but the interest paid on them was real enough, and enabled herself and her husband to live in comparative comfort during the next ten years.

It was well for Laura, in these altered circumstances, that she had no expensive tastes to sacrifice—nay, more, that her childhood had been passed in an atmosphere of frugal refinement, where she was trained to consider little luxuries of such small account as to forego them of her own free will for the benefit of others, and find in the deprivation a source of actual enjoyment.

Her husband, too, though less accustomed to self-denial, had been bred with those "affluent notions" which, according to Thring of Uppingham, better fit a boy to bear with equanimity the vicissitudes of later life than if he had been "blighted before starting by a more grinding experience."

His past imprudence was responsible for their present straits ; and for that very reason Laura's heart went out to him, brimful of cheery pity, and she was careful to keep in persistent evidence the silver linings of the financial cloud. Her diary at this time shows that she read a great deal on topics likely to arouse

his interest. During their stay at Costessey in the autumn of 1831 the villagers had no reason to suspect there was any abatement in her worldly prosperity, while the children staying at the Hall found Mrs. Petre, as we have seen, just the same as in her joyous girlhood, and her husband a most amusing and good-natured playmate.

Even with her parents Laura could not speak freely of her cares, for her mother's failing health was in itself a fresh cause for uneasiness. Lady Stafford's journal at this period shows how constantly her thoughts were fixed on Eternity.

"I resign to God's holy Will the delight I took in having an always affectionate sister," is the prelude to the edifying details concerning Mrs. Smythe's last illness, March, 1831.

"Nothing but Religion avails," she wrote a year later, on the demise of her father's sister, Mrs. Cole, "the last *but one* of an ancient Catholic race! Oh, may I strive so to prepare for my own last hour, that the remnant of my life may be spent in thanksgiving for God's infinite Mercies to me, in prayer for those still living in my affection, and for the dear ones who have gone to sleep in Our Lord!"

Mrs. Cole had been her confidant since babyhood, and had sometimes come to look after the children at Costessey when their mother was unavoidably absent. "Laura is the flower of the flock," the old lady was fond of repeating. In her opinion the capabilities of the earnest, helpful little girl were not enough appreciated in the home circle, and she was especially wroth when her favourite married a man so much her senior, before she had time to see the world and make her own choice.

But to return to Lady Stafford. The doctors ad-



vised a complete change of scene, and arrangements were made for the temporary closing of the Hall. Its inmates were to spend some years on the Continent ; but first there were some visits to pay, including one, by royal command, to Windsor Castle.

It was a very sad departure from Costessey. Lady Stafford seemed unlike her usual self, and unable to repress emotion on taking leave of old friends. When the chaplain, Mr. Husenbeth, came to say good-bye, she was extremely agitated, and followed him into the park without her hat as long as she could catch a glimpse of his retreating form. She was visibly affected on the morrow, as she finally drove away ; and even the coachman shed tears, when the villagers crowded round the carriage, riveting their gaze upon her, as if they had a presentiment it was the last time they would see her alive.

In the first days of September she and her husband spent a few days at Windsor Castle, where her sister-in-law, Lady Bedingfeld, was in attendance as Woman of the Bedchamber. It was a pleasant visit on the whole ; for the Court of Queen Adelaide was singularly free from the trammels of etiquette, and both their Majesties were always particularly gracious to the Jerningham connection. The King was eager to show them round the State rooms, and invited Lady Stafford's comments on the alterations in progress. There were long rambles, too, in the Park, rather trying to one in a weak state of health. She looked perceptibly brighter, however, and on her return to London felt strong enough to attend a City banquet. " Like an Empress," was the whispered comment, as she walked up the Guildhall, leaning on the arm of her eldest son.

This was her last appearance in public. She needed



rest, and the doctors advised a winter at Brighton. So a house was taken, facing the sea, and in the near neighbourhood of her valued friend, Mrs. Fitzherbert. Soon after her arrival erysipelas declared itself in the leg, and she had to submit to be nursed.

"It is too easy," she murmured, as they lifted her on to a water-bed.

The end came sooner than was expected. She retained the full use of her faculties and received the Last Sacraments with devout resignation. Lord Stafford and five of her children, including Laura, were kneeling around her dying bed.

Lady Lovat travelled post-haste from Scotland on hearing of her mother's danger. She stayed on for a few days at Costessey after the funeral, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world for Laura to run into her room, as she had often done in bygone years, and ensconce herself on the hearth-rug before a blazing fire for a chat before going to bed. It was still the younger sister seeking advice and sympathy from the elder ; but the theme was no longer the sorrows, joys, and perplexities of childhood. It was the tender, strong, womanly heart, "not overmuch uplifted in prosperity nor cast down in tribulation," frankly facing the difficulties of the immediate future, and quietly determined so to exert her immense influence over her husband as to reconcile him to his altered circumstances and to bring out all that was best in his nature.

Soon it was time to bid a long farewell to the scenes of childhood. Lord Stafford went abroad with his three unmarried daughters ; and the flag, denoting that the family is in residence, was not seen to float above the Great Tower at Costessey until 1836, when he brought home his second wife, a Catholic lady from Maryland, who was sister to the Duchess of Leeds and

the Marchioness of Wellesley.\* She was pious and cheerful, and seems to have been a great comfort to her husband in his declining years and to have made a pleasant home for Isabella. The twins, however, never returned to Costessey for a permanency. They lived together, mostly at Leamington. Frances died at Paris in 1838, and three years later Georgina re-joined her in the family vault.

Laura often met her father during his years of bereavement ; for in order to carry on their plans for retrenchment, it was judged expedient that the Petres should spend several months of each year abroad. We hear of them in diaries and letters, at Paris, in Switzerland, and on the German Rhine, everywhere making new friends or meeting old ones. Indeed, Creevy ill-naturedly accuses Brougham of shortening the Parliamentary session in 1834 on purpose to join the Petres at Lausanne.

The very first winter of their exile was spent in Rome, where they had more than one audience of Gregory XVI., and where they also were introduced to the Grand Duke Alexander, heir to All the Russias. He was delighted with Laura, and the memory of his genial kindness intensified the horror with which, in 1881, she heard the details of his assassination.

There is a well-known story that Pius IX. once asked two strangers, who were taking leave of him, how long they had been in Rome.

" Only three weeks ?" he said to the first, " then I must bid you good-bye." Turning to the other

\* The Duke of Wellington was not the only celebrity with whom this lady was connected by marriage. Her first husband, Mr. Patterson, was brother to the sister-in-law of Napoleon the Great. The Marquis of Wellesley was Viceroy at Dublin at the time of his wedding, and, quite as a matter of course, his American bride drove in state every Sunday to Mass.

pilgrim : " Six months, did you say ? In your case it is mere ' au revoir,' for you will certainly come back."

The Petres returned several times to Rome. Indeed, with them, Holy Week in the Eternal City was quite the usual thing. They had many useful friends there. Dr. Wiseman was rector of the English College, and Cardinal Acton, the ex-officio friend of British tourists, arranging audiences for them, and procuring admission to privileged places and ceremonies. His youthful secretary, the Rev. Thomas Grant, proved an ideal guide to the spots of interest in and round Rome, and his comments and lucid explanations made such excursions doubly agreeable ; for he added to the qualities of a first-rate cicerone much solid erudition, true Catholic feeling, and enthusiastic piety. He conducted the Petres to many an out-of-the-way shrine, " not set down in the usual programme of British sightseers, but redolent with martyr memories and the perfume of dead sanctity and living holiness."

During these repeated sojourns in the Eternal City, Laura gained practical insight into the well-organized works of charity in which Roman ladies took an active part, without noise or ostentation and often at the cost of much personal inconvenience. This knowledge proved of value to her when the improvement in her husband's finances enabled them to live more or less permanently in London. *Give all thou canst* was, as ever, the keynote of her life, but for the time being " chill penury " necessitated prudent calculation in the matter of almsgiving as in other items of expenditure. The wholesome discipline this entailed on one of her ardent temperament rendered her ingenious throughout life to effect the greatest good possible with the means at her disposal, and willing (as in

childhood) cheerfully to forego personal comforts so as to benefit Christ in His poor and in His churches.

In his rich days Mr. Petre had never been remiss in the duties of almsgiving. Whenever he gave an entertainment to his friends, for instance, he used to put aside a certain sum so that the poor might have their share in the merrymaking. With easy good-nature he had been wont to give to all comers, without inquiry into the merits of each case. And now that such indiscriminate lavishness was beyond his grasp, and that his natural benevolence had to seek an outlet in personal service, his energies developed and his mental powers expanded, so that on his return to England he was fitted to take a prominent part in good works, to become, as he jocularly expressed it, "a sturdy beggar" on behalf of "the poor Catholic who looks to his richer brother for relief, resting his claim upon the charter: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'"

This happy change may have been in some measure due to his wife's example and conversation; but a lasting impression was also made on his mind by the effective associations of earnest Catholic laymen with whom he came in contact during his travels in France and Italy. Everywhere, too, he found traces of British benevolence during the grand old penal days, and every Catholic and patriotic instinct was stirred within him as he contemplated: "The precious monuments of the piety of our ancestors, and of that enduring Faith which, when persecuted in our own country, quickly took root in foreign soil, and there flourished, till by the merciful decree of Heaven it was happily enabled to live again in our own land."

Some years later, he says, to stimulate the zeal of

his fellow-religionists on behalf of the schools : " When I was in Rome, I saw, among other curiosities, a register of English charities and educational establishments on the Continent, in the days of persecution. It was truly edifying to see how, year by year, while estates were confiscated at home and the heads of Catholic families were subjected to grievous pains and penalties, still new charities were founded and new schools erected by their means, for the support of their exiled brethren and the education of their children."

Laura's practical mind was more concerned with the actual status of these institutions, and she was active in procuring for them postulants and boarders, and in otherwise contributing to their material prosperity. But she did not fail to encourage her husband's praiseworthy enthusiasm over the history of their origin and past achievements. She helped him to collect and classify the notes which he afterwards embodied in the book published after his death by Dr. Husenbeth : *Notices of the English Colleges and Convents, after the Dissolution of Religious Houses in England.*

This interesting compilation naturally influenced the trend of the Petres' travels, and was one reason why they finally selected Brussels for their headquarters. Here they rented a large furnished house, where they were able to live in comparative comfort, although rigid economy was necessitated alike by their straitened circumstances and their charitable tendencies. Laura always liked the Belgians, and was fond of narrating how she noticed in the Brussels shops that a beggar, come for an alms, was waited on with respectful alacrity, just like a customer. Congenial company was to be found among the English residents, and the Belgian aristocracy were not slow to open their doors to the friends of their beloved King.



For Leopold I. was winning golden opinions from his subjects, who were proud of the prestige which his tact and prudence obtained in European diplomacy. His marriage with a Catholic princess gave great satisfaction, and his voluntary assurance that the children should be brought up in their mother's Religion obviated the disagreeable necessity of exacting his promise to that effect. The Petres were always sure of a cordial reception at the royal palace of Laeken, where Leopold had the pleasure of introducing Laura to "my dear Queen, very clever, very accomplished, and very, *very* pious."

Marie Louise of Orleans was indeed a pattern of womanly virtues. She prized at its true value the boon of Christian education for every child in every household of the little kingdom ; and the Belgian hierarchy, in their struggles to secure this most precious fruit of the liberty of conscience guaranteed by the Constitution, could always count on her tactful advocacy of this sacred cause. For though Dutch interference in the curriculum of studies was one of the main causes of the Revolution of September, 1830, it was hardly to be expected that Leopold could understand the Catholic attitude towards this vital question. Indeed, in the very dawn of Belgian Independence, there was established the undenominational University of Brussels, a formidable organization against Religion, working under the sanction of the laws and deriving support from the public treasury.

The Catholic party felt they had been overreached, but they wasted no time in futile regrets. As early as 1834 the Primate and Bishops set about restoring the Catholic University of Louvain, which had enjoyed a world-wide reputation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They could not count on State aid ; but they



knew the people were with them, and they relied on God and on themselves in the unequal contest with the united forces of Continental Liberals.

Mr. Petre had long been interested in the education question, and contact with the Catholic party in Belgium but clinched his conviction as to its paramount importance in modern times.

"We want funds for the convent: let the church take care of itself!" is the heading of one of his appeals through the Press in aid of an educational community in the London slums.

"Tell Dr. de Lima," he says to an acquaintance whom he meets in Paris, "that when I come to England in the spring, I will see what I can do for his chapel. But in the meantime the schools must be attended to."

And on his return to his native land he never failed, in season and out of season, to keep this important question well to the front.

"Education—and without spiritual instruction there can be no education—is the object nearest my heart," he announces from a public platform. "Vainly do we boast of a few conversions from without, while thousands of our children are exposed to proselytism in the schools. The removal or the endurance of this evil rests with you. Every man can give something; and the little given, added to the little given by many others, makes a considerable amount. Why should we be behind the sectarians in raising the means for educating our young people?"

Mr. Petre's friends were at first but faintly surprised at his enthusiastic outbursts. A new hobby this, they deemed it, soon to be ridden to death! But the years, as they sped and extended his sphere of usefulness, only seemed to deepen his sense of responsibility. It became impossible not to realize

that much of his perseverance in philanthropic projects was due to the steady, unobtrusive influence of his wife. This was Laura's great gift: the power to recognize the suitability of certain individuals for certain works, and to insure success by timely counsel and sympathetic trust. She knew when to take the initiative and when to stand aside and smile approval on the achievements of her fellow-workers.

Her husband might have pointed to her as a concrete instance of the results of a Christian upbringing, such as he was fond of praising. All that was best in her character had been carefully developed, while the impulsive impatience of her early years had mellowed and sweetened into energetic longanimity, so gradually that it needed a ten years' absence to make the change perceptible to her nearest and dearest. The woman, like the child, found her happiness in the duty that was obvious. Each phase of her life seems a spiritual training for the next. Fidelity to the graces of the present spared her futile regrets for the waste of past opportunities, and enabled her to face the future with placid serenity.

No wonder that, when she settled finally in Chelsea, her Bromley friends found her "if possible more beautiful than ever."

## CHAPTER IX

### FOR FAITH AND FATHERLAND

"The primal duties shine aloft—like stars ;  
The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless  
Are scattered at the feet of Man—like flowers."

WORDSWORTH.

ST. MARY'S, Cadogan Place, Chelsea, was originally a very small chapel, erected by the Abbé de Franous, one of the émigré priests who have done so much for Catholicity in England. Such evident results rewarded his zeal that, in 1825, it became necessary to enlarge his chapel. Dr. Poynter, Vicar Apostolic, blessed it afresh in the presence of the French Ambassador ; and seeing that "the congregation overflowed to the doors," judged it expedient to appoint a second priest to the mission.

Chelsea was in those days quite a fashionable part of London, and though the greater part of the parishioners were of course the very poor, there was a fair sprinkling of the aristocracy, both British and foreign. Nor were the middle classes altogether unrepresented, though the Church seems at that period to have counted comparatively few recruits among the shopkeepers and skilled artisans.

In the spring of 1842 the Petres settled permanently at 26, Wilton Crescent, and soon made it a centre of active beneficence. The saintly Abbé de Franous had

died two years previously, but his successor, the Rev. Thomas Sisk, had been working under him since 1826, and thoroughly understood the needs and resources of the flock entrusted to his care. Father Sisk eventually entered the Cistercian Order, and lived to a ripe old age in Mount St. Bernard's Abbey, Leicestershire. He retained to the last a very high opinion of Laura's piety and talents, and often spoke of her salutary influence in his mission.

We gather from a private diary that St. Mary's in 1844 was the only Catholic place of worship in London with steeple and bell; that it was not uncommon among the leisured classes in other districts to make Mass or Benediction in the devotional chapel the pleasant objective of a Sunday excursion; and that Mr. Petre, ever a "sturdy beggar" in the cause of Christ, used to take up the collection at the Offertory.

No statue of Our Blessed Lady had been exposed for public veneration in England since the Reformation, but Laura saw no reason why Chelsea should not take the initiative, as in the matter of the "church-going bell." Father Sisk was of a different opinion. Devotion to the Mother of God, as he understood it, made him shrink from furnishing any possible incentive to the blasphemous sneers of the bigoted. In the end Laura's powers of persuasion prevailed, and he allowed her to purchase a statue, which soon became a centre of tender piety in the neighbourhood. The poorer clients of Mary delighted to bring to its feet their tribute of lights and flowers, and certain titled ladies had their names embroidered on the costly tissues which they offered for its adornment.

The unpretending chapel has long since disappeared. A roomy church was built on its site in 1878, and a generous donor presented to it a magnificent statue

of Our Lady of Lourdes. The poor of the district were not readily reconciled to the change, and loudly voiced their regrets at the disappearance of the image which they had venerated for so many years as "Mrs. Petre's Blessed Lady."

Father Sisk showed less reluctance to accept co-operation in other good works. The school seems to have been well equipped and in the hands of a capable teacher; for Laura limited her help in that quarter to smiles of encouragement, while her husband enjoyed arranging for treats and prizes. But the great drawback in Chelsea arose from the heterogeneous elements in the congregation itself. In his efforts to break down social barriers, the worthy pastor found valuable auxiliaries in the Petres. Husband and wife endeavoured, each in characteristic fashion, to acclimatize on British soil the pious and charitable associations which they had so often admired on the Continent.

In adapting these to London surroundings, Mr. Petre fell back on medieval institutions, "the indigenous products of our soil and climate in the Ages of Faith." He inaugurated in Chelsea a "Holy Guild," which, in his mind, was to bring about a union of classes, "the want of which is one of the curses of the age and a fearful prognostic of the future." There was a full account in the *Tablet* of the first meeting of this Guild in Chelsea Schoolroom, when Mr. Petre explained his ideals. One hundred and four members were enrolled on the spot, and fourteen pounds collected, exclusive of the ten guineas he himself contributed.

Laura worked on more modern lines. Her practical mind saw that it was possible to band the ladies of the parish into an Association modelled on the Conferences



of St. Vincent of Paul, which Frederic Ozanam had recently organized in France. Having carefully studied the spirit and method of the Paris Conferences, she modified their rules to suit London needs and customs, and the sex of her fellow-workers. Dr. Griffiths, Vicar Apostolic of the London District, blessed and sanctioned the scheme, and gave the little band its name, *St. Elizabeth's Society*.

Some of the members merely subscribed to the funds and attended occasionally at the weekly meetings ; others, more zealous or less hampered by circumstances, devoted their leisure to personal service among the poor. All met in a spirit of cordial frankness and simplicity. The Society still flourishes in Chelsea, and its aims and methods have been adopted in other parishes.

Lord Palmerston once remarked that Laura was fit to rule a kingdom. She had undoubtedly great powers of organization, world-embracing sympathy, and exquisite tact. She always preferred to use her great gifts "as one under authority," and her clear-sighted humility seems to have fitted in with the decrees of Divine Providence at every phase of her career. Thus the Countess of Newburgh was from the first recognized as Acting President of St. Elizabeth's Society, while Laura undertook the post of Secretary. She employed no amanuensis, and, as far as possible, answered all letters by return of post. Under the stress of business her handwriting rapidly altered for the worse.

"I could never get sugar on my bread-and-butter now," she said, referring to the usual reward in Costessey nursery for a well-written page.

Yet she habitually took pains with the wording of her letters, and read them carefully over, to punctuate and rectify omissions. Her terse and pithy style



exemplified well Longfellow's advice to a young author.

"Use as clear words as possible, or your readers will certainly misunderstand: use as few words as possible, or your readers will certainly skip."

Her letters were kind as well as concise. When their contents were disagreeable, she made a rough draft and carefully corrected, so as to hurt as little as possible, and to convince her correspondents of her sympathetic consideration.

Nor were her labours confined to the desk. The pen was oftentimes exchanged for the needle; and her friends, when they called, usually found her engaged on some useful garment for the poor.

"I like saints who are fond of work," was her smiling comment, when a visitor waxed eloquent on some newly-discovered devotion not to be found in *The Garden of the Soul*.

She was a model, too, to the other members in her whole-hearted attention to individual cases, and she never allowed the duties of the morrow to encroach upon the business of the day. In the homes of the poor she was always a welcome visitor, discreetly reticent in her inquiries, yet ready in due season with words of homely advice, and, as befitted a daughter of Lady Stafford, an adept in the art of making a comfortable bed. With sick children her motherliness was irresistible.

Nothing could exceed her delicacy in almsgiving, and all thanks were adroitly turned aside, usually in an upward direction.

"I am too happy to do anything for one who loves God," she would pleasantly remark; or, "Don't thank *me*. God has given it to me for *you*."

Indeed, she preferred sending her gifts anonymously

through the post, so that the unasked and unlooked-for help might be accepted as coming direct from Heaven, without reference to the human instrument of Divine Providence. Such was her favourite way of helping persons who had "seen better days"—a type of poverty which she treated with peculiar tenderness and respect. If she heard, for instance, of a family whose means were crippled because they had become Catholics, she made a point of inquiring thoroughly into the case, so as to help them in the best way. Sometimes she took upon herself to pay for the children in suitable schools. Only the Father who seeth in secret can reckon the number of hearts thus lightened of a grievous burden of anxiety. Only the Lord of the Harvest can estimate at its true value the fruitful work for His glory done by those who, thanks to her timely help, grew up practical Catholics and useful members of Society.

The training of the young was all through life one of her favourite works of mercy. Since Almighty God had seen fit to deny her the joys of motherhood, she felt free to spend time and money in promoting the well-being of the little ones who were growing up around her. Her account-books show that she was in the habit of paying for the education of her god-children; and it was characteristic of her thoughtful kindness to allow for pocket-money in the margin of expenses.

From the foregoing remarks, it will be readily inferred that the Petres did not restrict their alms to the limits of their parish. Applications for help flowed in from all parts of the country; and as Laura kept count of every penny passing through her hands, she knew exactly how much money she could spare at any given time, which items of expenditure she could retrench with least inconvenience to others, and on what

occasions it behoved her, in justice to existing claims, to refrain, though regretfully, from immediate assistance.

Her husband was at one with her in all her charitable undertakings. It was their holy custom to offer jointly some love-gift to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, on Corpus Christi and on other great feasts. There may still be seen in various sacristies in England between thirty and forty sacred vessels—ciboriums, chalices, and monstrances—inscribed with the names of the donors: “Eduardus et Laura Petre conjuges, quorum animabus Deus propitiatur.”

Sometimes Laura commissioned a friend to purchase what was most needed in certain parishes, and she invariably added:

“Pray take care that whatever you buy is really good.”

Her name, too, is associated with her husband's in the chapel which Mr. Petre built at Selby for the use of his tenants, and to which Laura supplied the altar furniture and a statue of Our Lady.

To return to Wilton Crescent. The priests in the neighbourhood had a standing invitation to dinner on all Sundays and Fridays. And, in the words of an old servant:

“Many of the good things that the body requires were sent to them every Christmas.”

To confer happiness seemed an instinctive craving of Laura's nature. She entertained on a large scale, and mixed enough in Society to keep all her old friends and to attract new ones. Her tact was perfect, and she missed no chances of furthering the interests of our holy Faith “by kindly word and virtuous deed.” The novelty of Emancipation had by this time worn off, but the Tractarian Movement at Oxford and the Camden Society at Cambridge again made things

Catholic "fashionable" in London circles. Convert clergymen found the Petres helpful in procuring them remunerative employment or means to study for the priesthood.

Help of another sort was rendered to Dr. Gentili, one of Rosmini's Fathers of Charity, who, about the year 1845, made the higher paths of spirituality all the vogue in London. Laura initiated him with tactful prudence into English ways, and urged her friends by word and example to take part in those wonderful retreats, when, in broken-English, he disposed many souls among his hearers to embrace a life of perfection.

Another "Catholic lion let loose in London" during the Season of 1843 was the celebrated Capuchin, Father Theobald Mathew. Scarcely five years had elapsed since that memorable 10th of April when, yielding to the arguments of his Quaker friend, he signed "in the Name of God," his personal pledge to wage war on drunkenness; and already the Temperance Movement associated with his name was bidding fair to ruin the distillery business in which his own relations had invested their money. His crusade in Scotland, and now in England, won for him the respect and co-operation of worthy men irrespective of creed. Indeed, it was in connection with temperance lectures in the Midlands that young Thomas Cook guaranteed to one of the great railway companies that he would collect enough passengers to make it worth their while to run trains at reduced rates. The experiment proved a success, and this was the beginning of the "personally conducted trips" which have made the name of Cook famous in the civilized world.

Laura's connection with the Apostle of Temperance dated from 1840. She signed the pledge as soon as she learnt that five hundred ladies had enrolled them-

selves in Dublin among the total abstainers, and that Father Mathew valued highly the salutary influence of such example to preserve poor weak creatures from sin and misery. She and her husband would gladly have had him as their guest when he came to London ; but he preferred, as usual, the freedom of an hotel, where all sorts of visitors could have access to him at any hour.

He accepted, however, an invitation to breakfast at 26, Wilton Crescent, and no doubt urged the eight hundred guests assembled in his honour to follow the example set by their hostess. Later in the day, he addressed a crowded meeting in Golden Lane, Barbican ; and among the hundreds who came up to take the pledge at its close was the Earl of Arundel and Surrey, the tears of emotion rolling down his cheeks. Father Mathew hesitated in his case, lest the act were the outcome of impulse, but finally yielded to his humble appeal.

“ Ah, Father Mathew, I had the happiness of receiving Holy Communion from your hand this morning, in Chelsea Chapel. I *have* reflected, and I thank God for the resolution, trusting to His Goodness for grace to persevere.”

Daniel O’Connell regarded the Temperance Movement as an important factor in his Repeal tactics. It is well known that the Liberator carried on his Plan of Campaign on strictly constitutional lines. He never wearied of repeating, “ The man who commits a crime gives strength to the enemy ; ” and he constantly urged his followers to constitute themselves “ a noble army of teetotallers ” in the interests of law and order.

A few English Catholics, who had not outlived the traditions and panic terrors of the Cisalpine Club, were vehement in their denunciations of O’Connell’s pro-



ceedings during the Repeal Year of 1843, and especially of the support he received from the bishops and clergy of Ireland. Laura was often pained at the opinions ventilated in her presence by men otherwise worthy of respect. They seemed to her so contrary to sound sense and to the teaching of her childhood. The following is Dr. Husenbeth's reply to an inquiry of hers on a point of ecclesiastical discipline :

" I need not dwell at any length on the points on which you request information. They are very simple, when divested of extraneous matter.

" 1. Can the Pope abrogate a hierarchy ?

" Nothing has occurred yet in the history of the Church, as far as I know, to raise the inquiry of the Pope's abstract right to do so. What Pius VII. did in France was not abrogation, but a remodelling, called for by the very extraordinary position of the French Church. The Pope called on the bishops to resign their sees for the greater good of Religion in France. Those who refused were deprived of their sees, because they had obstinately refused to obey the wise decree of the Pope, who undoubtedly possesses this high prerogative, though it is reserved for extreme cases only.

" 2. Mr. Fraser asks: Why could not the Pope destroy the Irish bishoprics ?

" I answer: Why should he ? It would be a monstrous proposition that the Pope should abolish a regular hierarchy of nearly thirty bishops, governing a regular Church of seven millions, who have never swerved from the Faith since their conversion. But it is surely the height of extravagance to imagine that he should do this merely to please a Protestant Government."

Laura, as a rule, avoided polemics. But the whole



tenor of her life—and herein lay her chief influence—was an object-lesson on the fruits of faith. Above all, the marked improvement in her husband surprised and edified those who had known him in his frivolous years of early manhood. After Mr. Petre's death, Canon Doyle, of St. George's Cathedral, Southwark—the Father Thomas of a previous page—refers to his “pious activities” in terms of unstinted praise.

“This vast metropolis knew him from one end to the other, and in the most destitute localities his name will long be held in benediction. Alike in summer and in winter, sometimes when in very delicate health, he was ever ready and willing, no matter at what cost to himself, to do anything which lay in his power in behalf of the Catholic Charitable Institutions of London. At one time chairman, at another steward, sometimes presiding at a select meeting of gentlemen at the Albion or Freemasons' Tavern, sometimes in some public-house or retired schoolroom, he was all to all, urbane and courteous in every place and at any time. He will be much missed by me and by many. We could have better spared a better man—notwithstanding that it would be a search to find one more useful and more practically religious.”

The headquarters of Catholic Committees was then, and had been from 1792, the Freemasons' Tavern, a Renaissance building opposite the Freemasons' Hall, Lincoln's Inn, whose old walls had erstwhile echoed the impassioned utterances of Milner, Grattan, and Edmund Burke. Sometimes meetings were held in less reputable localities, and whenever Mr. Petre had to take the chair in an East End public-house, he made a point of going in a hired conveyance, because he did not like to risk his servants in the neighbourhood. He himself cheerfully submitted to any disagreeables

incidental to his works of zeal — cutting short a pleasant tour on the Rhine, for instance, when he read in a German paper of an outburst of bigotry against the Convent of Mercy in Virginia Street ; remaining in town to further some pious project when the London Season was over, and his friends had sought a shelter in their country houses from the heat and glare of the dusty streets, etc.

In 1843 Pope Gregory XVI. created him a Knight of the Order of Christ. Mr. Petre was humbly grateful for this “undeserved honour,” as he styled it. But there was another title, dearer to his heart because his conscience told him it was appropriate : “ Friend of the Poor and Advocate of Catholic Education.” Most of the societies with which he was connected dealt with the maintenance of the old and infirm, or the instruction and apprenticeship of the young. It is curious to note how steadily he keeps the second of these two objects before the minds of his hearers—even when speaking in his official capacity as President of the *Aged Poor Society*.

In political action everything depends on the power of fighting. Thus the Catholic body in Ireland, “ too strong to brook ill-treatment,” were on an equality with other denominations as regards the State aid granted since 1833 to National Schools. But the words of Edmund Burke continued true east of St. George’s Channel. “ Sixty thousand Catholics are enough to torment, but not enough to fear.” And the chief service rendered by Mr. Petre to the Faith in his Fatherland was his persistent reiteration, in season and out of season : “ In the United Kingdom, at least, justice is obtained, less by conciliating individuals than by making justice the interest of the Party in power.”

With this end in view he worked with Charles



HON. EDWARD PETRE

*From a painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence, R.A.*



Langdale and other kindred spirits to develop the *Catholic Institute of Great Britain*, "a political and philanthropic league for the removal of the religious grievances still pressing on the poor, for the relief of spiritual destitution and temporal want, as well as for guarding the young against the dangers of proselytism, and supplying the *lamentable deficiency of charitable education.*"

The words italicized need a brief explanation. England's neglect to educate her poor children had been for centuries a reproach to her civilization. Despite the statute of Henry VIII. ordering schools to be established in every parish, she remained from the Reformation till the Reform Bill of 1832, far behind every other great country—indeed, far behind countries which throughout this period were retrograding in other respects.

There were Grammar Schools in plenty, founded by individuals, and endowed with scholarships of which the middle class reaped the advantages. But such establishments, as a matter of course, were entirely lacking in those poverty-stricken districts which stood in extremest need of such help. When the first Factory Act was put in force in 1833, there existed, according to a Blue Book report, few public schools in towns, and none in villages, and all the education received by masters as well as hands was derived from Sunday-schools.

English statesmen during three centuries had been kept from any serious attempt to grapple with the evil by the doctrine that education ought not to be the concern of Government, but was a purely religious duty incumbent on the Church. The clergy of the various denominations did indeed exert themselves meritoriously in several districts, and the laity sub-

scribed and otherwise co-operated; but from the ministry of Clarendon to that of Walpole, the Protestant Dissenters were heavily handicapped by the trend of legislation, while, on the other hand, up to 1778 the honours of penal liabilities were pretty evenly divided between Popish priest and Popish schoolmaster. Even after the Act of Emancipation Catholic teachers remained under a species of police surveillance, for they were obliged to present themselves four times a year to *record* at the Quarter Sessions, and were expressly forbidden by statute to receive into their schools the child of any Protestant father.

With the advent of Brougham into the Cabinet, as we have seen, Government became alive to its responsibilities. Among other reforms, an annual grant was voted for educational purposes, and for some years this grant was divided between the *National Society of the Church of England* and the *British and Foreign School Society*, established by the Dissenters in 1808 "to unite all Protestant sects on the principles of religious equality." But from 1833 until 1847 not a penny of this grant found its way into Catholic hands. We had no official Association embodying our claims; and the fierce outcry of bigotry, when Peel augmented the Parliamentary Grant to Maynooth, so frightened his successors in office that Lord John Russell refused to admit Catholic schools to any share in the advantages of the educational reforms proposed by his Ministry in 1846.

But by this time the Catholic Institute was in fighting trim, and Sir William Molesworth found it comparatively easy in the course of debate to convince the Premier that the Catholic vote was not of negligible value as an election asset, and that any further ignoring



of the rights of taxpayers would lead to a serious defection in the ranks of the Government supporters.

Lord John climbed down gracefully, and in December, 1847, a Minute of the Privy Council admitted Christian schools of all denominations to a share in the Parliamentary Grant. Religious instruction was expected to be given daily in such schools, at any hour most convenient to managers and teachers. It was paid for, and in Anglican schools tested, by the State. In other schools Government examination was confined to the secular branches; and no one was to be appointed Inspector of Catholic schools unless he was approved by the recently established *Catholic Poor School Committee*. At the same date the Statute Book was purified by the removal of certain obnoxious restrictions overlooked in the hurried Partial Emancipation Act of 1829. Henceforward Catholics were as free as other British citizens to preach, teach, or write against the "Coronation Oath"; and Protestant parents (great capital had been made of their grievance) were no longer prevented by law from sending their children to Catholic schools.

Not the least among the advantages accruing from the Parliamentary proceedings of 1847 was the *Catholic Poor School Committee*, established this year by our Bishops in England and Wales to be their accredited representatives at Whitehall. Two-thirds of its members were laymen, and Mr. Petre was one of the first nominees. We may fitly conclude this chapter by an extract from its twenty-fourth Annual Report, issued in 1871, when Elementary Education entered upon a new phase.

"During the whole series of these grants, extending over twenty-three years, a great Public Department, representing Parliament and the State itself, has

treated Catholic School Teachers and Managers like other citizens of a free Government, and Catholic Poor Schools like Poor Schools non-Catholic. We had fair play and no favour ; and the Privy Council seeing, by the operation of its own rules in a great variety of detail, our needs and difficulties, was helping us to do an indispensable work. Hence has followed the removal of many prejudices and misconceptions on both sides. But to realize how great an advantage this has been, it is requisite to remember that this is the first time for three hundred years that Catholics have been treated with fair play in the distribution of a public grant, and more particularly the first time that they have been helped in the work of education without any sacrifice of their Religion being imposed upon them as a condition of help."

## CHAPTER X

### GOD'S WILL, GOD'S WAY

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom . . .  
Keep Thou my feet. I do not ask to see  
The distant scene. One step enough for me !"

NEWMAN.

IN the spring of 1846 Lord Stafford's youngest daughter Isabella had an acute attack of influenza which settled permanently upon her lungs. Laura nursed her throughout the languid summer, and early in November set out with her for Paris to consult an eminent specialist on diseases of the chest. Their worst fears were confirmed ; but a winter at Naples was recommended, and so Mr. and Mrs. Petre made arrangements for a long visit to the sunny South.

The little party went by easy stages, travelling mostly by canal, and with prolonged halts when reduced to rail and *diligence*. Laura's concise little diary remains as evidence of her thoughtful anxiety for the comfort and enjoyment of " the poor child " and " my old man." Catherine Doggett of course accompanied her mistress, and proved an immense help, as the invalid had been warmly attached to her from babyhood.

Genoa was reached on Christmas Day, and that same evening Isabella took a decided turn for the worse. She died on the 1st of January in holy dispositions,

and Laura, who had scarcely left her side during the previous week, helped with her own hands to prepare her for the grave. Four days later, after a solemn Mass of Requiem, the coffin was entrusted to a priest who accompanied it to the family vault at Costessey.

Laura sought her truest comfort in prayer and Holy Communion, and thirty Masses were offered for her sister's soul on the day of the funeral. She had little leisure to indulge her grief, for a few days later Mr. Petre was laid up with a bad attack of gout. This malady was in his case chronic, and, it must be confessed, he was at all times trying as an invalid. Even at their own home in Chelsea, with every convenience at hand to alleviate his sufferings, his wife could not always succeed in concealing the strain upon her powers of endurance ; for he could not bear to have her long out of sight, and friends and domestics often marked with affectionate pity the involuntary quiver that thrilled her frame, when the querulous cry rang through the house :

“ Laura ! Laura ! Where is Laura ? ”

But while they pitied, they admired the alacrity with which she would recover herself and obey the summons with a smile or joke upon her lips.

At Genoa, worn out as she was with grief and exhaustion, her physical powers collapsed after ten days' patient endurance, and the doctors prescribed complete rest, and, as soon as possible, change of scene.

There was another invalid in the old-fashioned Italian seaport. We learn from a great-niece of Daniel O'Connell that Laura, in the midst of her troubles, sent many a kind message and dainty dish to cheer the breaking heart of the dying Liberator.

As soon as Mr. and Mrs. Petre were able to travel, they went on to Rome, where Laura was brought to

the verge of the grave by an acute attack of erysipelas, followed by fever. For some days she hovered between life and death, and the convalescence was long and tedious. She was well enough, however, to assist at some of the services of Holy Week, and to drive about quietly with her husband. Dr. Grant, then Rector of the English College, was often of the party, and laid himself out to hasten her complete recovery by his bright and entertaining conversation.

He introduced to the Petres an ecclesiastical student who was destined to be one of his own successors in the See of Southwark. Mr. Robert Aston Coffin saw a great deal of Laura at this time; and so great was the esteem which they expressed for each other in after-years that many people believed she and her husband had found him the means of studying for the priesthood. Such, however, was not the case. Mr. Coffin had, it is true, given up a rich piece of preferment in the Church of England; but he had a private income of his own, sufficiently large to provide matter for further sacrifice, when, some years later, he became a Redemptorist.

The Petres had more than one audience of Pius IX., then in the first year of his chequered Pontificate. Kitty envied her mistress this holy privilege; and Laura, ever pleased to give pleasure, arranged that on the next opportunity her maid should accompany her, instead of her husband. Needless to say she bought for her the black silk dress and lace mantilla required by Papal etiquette. So Kitty received the Pope's blessing for herself and her kinsfolk, and Pius IX. spoke to her some words of fatherly kindness, which Mrs. Petre translated. Then began an animated conversation between the saintly Pontiff and the English lady. They talked French or Italian, and so

Kitty could not understand, but her mistress seemed delighted and, at the same time, strangely moved. A friend of her girlhood assures us that the Pope then told her of the services she would render the Church as a nun.

There is another anecdote of this last visit to Rome which is too edifying to omit. One day when they were out for a drive, the horses became unmanageable, and kicked and plunged in the most alarming way. At first Laura kept her seat, without showing the fear which she probably felt. But when the excited driver fluently cursed his team and poured forth a volley of blasphemous oaths, his language appalled her to such an extent that, pale and trembling, she hastened to alight from the carriage. During the remainder of her stay in Italy, she made a point of walking whenever she possibly could, to avoid the pain of listening to insults against God and His Blessed Mother. "Many a time," adds Catherine, "we returned to the hotel completely exhausted after a long excursion on foot in the heat of the Italian sun."

The Education Bill recalled Mr. Petre to London before Laura had quite recovered her normal health. So she stopped awhile at Amiens as the guest of her former governess (now Madame Dréville), and utilized the occasion to make a spiritual retreat under the guidance of the Abbé de Brandt, chaplain to the Ladies of the Sacred Heart and author of a series of Meditations, known in English as *Growth in the Knowledge and Love of Our Lord*.

When at last she returned to Chelsea, refreshed and invigorated in body and soul, she found Mr. Petre sadly in need of his helpmate. Legal documents pertaining to the management of his estates had accumulated while he was abroad, and the various charities with



which he was connected had also their quota of arrears. Most important of all, the Catholic Poor School Committee was in process of formation, and had to be in working order before the end of the year (1847), when the new regulations at Whitehall were to come into force. The powers of this Committee had to be defined; and the precise nature of its duties. Ways and means had to be discussed, to secure efficient teaching in the secular branches on which the Grant was to depend, and effective supervision of the religious instruction which the Government paid for but did not test. Then, too, there was the Training College at Hammersmith to provide and equip. A similar establishment for women teachers was, for lack of funds, too remote a possibility to be seriously discussed.

Mr. Petre was at this time in very delicate health; so many informal meetings took place at his house, and much business was discussed there with Mr. Nasmyth Stokes, chief of the Inspectors appointed by the Department for Catholic Schools. Laura was usually present, for her husband liked to refer to her on doubtful points. She spoke little, but Mr. Stokes was impressed by her business talents and sound common sense. Neither he, nor anyone else at that period, had the faintest suspicion of the great part she was destined to take in furtherance of the schemes under discussion.

Another frequent visitor at Wilton Crescent, and one always sure of a hearty welcome, was Dr. Doyle, who was now working heart and soul at the building of St. George's Cathedral. Pugin drew the plans, and Dr. Doyle begged the funds, soliciting in person the alms of the faithful throughout great part of Europe. So large was the sum of Mr. Petre's contributions that he had a claim to be buried in the Cathedral. Dr.

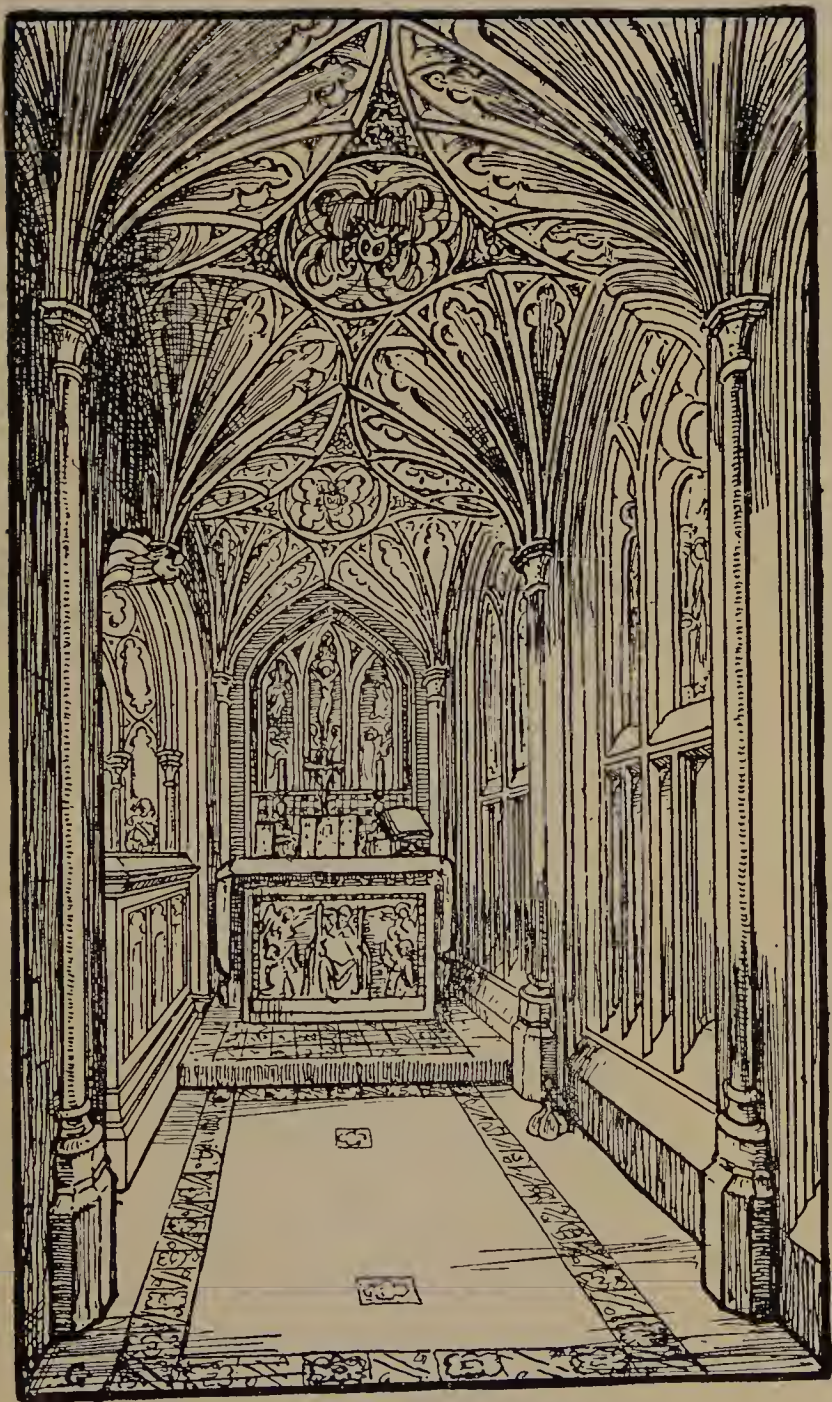
Doyle was grateful, not merely for the material help, but for the moral effect of this example, and for the whole-hearted approval of his design which the Petres evinced on every opportunity.

For there were many among the timid and the censorious to protest against the erection of so vast and ornate an edifice, as most extravagant and quite unnecessary. Nay, the floor-space in the body of the Church, calculated to seat three thousand worshippers, would but show up the fewness in numbers of the ordinary congregation !

Nevertheless, despite the cavillers, a triangular plot of ground was secured, with a frontage of three hundred feet on the Lambeth, St. George's, and Westminster Bridge Roads, and the foundations were dug on the Feast of Our Lady's Nativity, 1840. The site selected was the historic spot where, on the 2nd of June, 1780, Lord George Gordon harangued his crew of sixty thousand rioters with all the inflammatory vehemence incidental to the insanity lurking in his constitution. The Gordon Riots were in Laura's mind when she chose for the Petre Chantry a spot on the plans as remote as might be from the most public of the thoroughfares.

Once the foundations were laid, subscriptions flowed in. Soon the building was roofed, and visitors came to admire. Dr. Doyle turned their pious curiosity to account by drawing up special rules of ecclesiastical etiquette ; and Laura must have laughed heartily when she heard that, in the course of half an hour's conversation, a friend of hers had been mulcted in the sum of three shillings, for thrice miscalling the stately church *a chapel*.

The Cathedral was dedicated on July 4th, 1848, but Mr. Petre did not live to see it. In the spring he con-



THE PETRE CHANTRY, ST. GEORGE'S CATHEDRAL





tracted a severe chill which developed into congestion of the lungs, and the end came very quickly. He faced death with calm, offered his life to God, and received the Last Sacraments with great piety. He expired on the 8th of June, aged fifty-four. Laura held the Crucifix to his dying lips, and suggested to him the last words which he uttered, the sweet names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

On the thirtieth day after his decease, there was a solemn Requiem for the repose of his soul in the new Cathedral. About fifty priests were in attendance. Dr. Doyle sang the Mass, Bishop Morris preached, Dr. Wiseman and four other bishops pronounced the Absolutions around the catafalque. The Church was filled with friends and relatives, members of the various guilds to which Mr. Petre belonged, and eighteen hundred children from those elementary schools of which he had proved the persevering and efficient champion. After the service a substantial dole of bread was distributed at the doors by the Brethren of the Guilds. Laura had also provided refreshments for all the school-children present; and by her express desire the Pall which had covered the catafalque became the property of the recently erected Guild of St. George.

A week later Pugin called on her, with plans and specifications for the Chantry. It opens into the Lady aisle by a low archway, under which is the tomb of Caen stone, covered with a slab of black marble inlaid with brass. Beneath is the vault, whither Mr. Petre's coffin was transported from its temporary resting-place in the old Belgian Chapel, London Road. The altar is privileged. Here Mass is still offered daily, "for the repose of the soul of its founder and of all Christian souls." As long as she lived, Laura made a point of satisfying herself by personal inspection, from

time to time, that the vestments and altar-furniture were in good condition.

Mrs. Petre did not grieve inordinately, "as those who have no hope," over the death of the husband to whom she had devoted nineteen of the best years of her life. God had been very good to her throughout her married career, and there was nothing bitter to remember in its vicissitudes, nothing to be ashamed of, and much, very much, for which to be humbly grateful. But the feeling uppermost in her heart, as she afterwards owned, was intense thankfulness to God, that at last she was free to consecrate herself entirely to the Divine service.

Immediately after the "Month's Mind" she went down for three days to New Hall. In that birthplace of her early ideals, always redolent to her with holiest memories of her girlhood, she *renewed* the Vow of Chastity, which she may have taken in the first hours of her bereavement, or perhaps, conditionally, in her husband's lifetime. Mother Clifford was dead, but many of the Community had been her former mistresses or playmates; and it was pleasant once again to meet them under the grand old trees, or to join in their devotions when they filed into Church, the whiteness of their pleated surplices and flowing trains just relieved by the eight-pointed Cross in crimson cloth.

It was not, however, the beauty or the allusiveness of their costume which had chiefly awakened Laura's girlish enthusiasm in the past; it was the peace, the happiness, the aroma of holiness about the place. All these advantages had still their high place in her esteem—nay, she realized better their value after her experience of life in the world. But her lines were not to be cast in this pleasant place: she knew it, and was resigned. In a convent of contemplatives there was not



enough scope for that active co-operation in works of mercy, which was an instinctive craving of her nature.

“ Deep thoughts of God may fill the mind,  
In woods and lonely glen,  
But love of God, who died for souls,  
Leads back to haunts of men.”

Moreover, there is a tradition at New Hall that our Holy Father, Pius IX., had explicitly told her she was to serve God in one of the more modern Congregations.

There was time enough before her, however, for her aspirations towards a religious life to take definite shape. For the present, God's Will was clearly manifested by the circumstances of the case. She inherited the bulk of her husband's property, and from her knowledge of the law and its tedious machinery she could clearly forecast that the business connected with its management would keep her occupied for at least two years. There were mortgages to be cleared off, sales effected, and debts paid ; legacies, moreover, to be distributed (including a hundred pounds for the spiritual benefit of the Catholic convicts in Australia), and a prosperous future to be secured for the many pious enterprises begun or in contemplation. She fully understood that her husband's will was drawn up in the well-grounded anticipation that she would prudently employ the wealth at her disposal for the good of those around her ; and she rejoiced, as St. Teresa would have done in her place, that she possessed the means of serving God in His Church and in His poor.

Laura was never one to shirk a responsibility or put off a duty ; so when the brief three days' respite had come to an end, she returned to town, to plunge deep into the vortex of legal intricacies. But before leaving New Hall she wished to make her Jubilee offering to

the Convent, which was keeping that month its fiftieth anniversary. So she requested the Sisters to select a design for a white marble statue of Our Lady, which she commissioned to be carved for them at Rome.

Before the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption, Laura made an eight-days' retreat under the guidance of Father de Held, Rector of the Redemptorists at Clapham. Acting on his advice she drew up for herself a plan of life which provided for a day of recollection once a month, and the practice of particular examen so strongly recommended by St. Ignatius. Her Communions were so frequent during her widowhood that, were it not for ill-health and journeys, they might be classed as daily.

She was often ailing at this time, and had many chances of practising patience in sickness. So when business did not necessitate her presence in London, she was glad to escape to the country—to Danesfield, near Great Marlow, the country-seat of Lady Lovat's eldest daughter, Mrs. Scott Murray, or to Costessey, always the home of her heart, endeared by its memories, its beauties, and the familiar faces that smiled on her at every turn.

The villagers loved to meet her in her rambles through the park. She had always a pleasant greeting for each, a joyous reminiscence of a bygone adventure, or a word of sympathy for some present domestic trouble. She shook hands cordially with the old people, sometimes slipping a piece of money into the withered palm. The children, of course, were always sure of a caress, and often made happy by some little gift.

One of Catherine's nieces, Amelia Doggett, a frank outspoken girl of sixteen, with a pronounced attraction for the religious state, had the charge of telling Mrs. Petre of any cases of distress in the neighbourhood,

so that she might give help promptly and in the gracious, winning manner peculiarly her own.

Laura was now thirty-seven years of age, in the prime of her beauty, and mistress of a fairly large fortune. She had played her part, and a very successful part it was, in fashionable circles, and given proofs of a capacity for thoroughly enjoying life. Her friends quite made up their minds that her warm affections would before long be fixed upon someone worthy to share her heart ; and it was by no means unlikely that suitors would present themselves at the end of the period of seclusion which custom prescribes to widows. She, on her part, was too prudent to speak prematurely of her desire to embrace the religious life. But quietly—and her charities furnished her plenty of occasions—she made herself acquainted with the scope and spirit of most of the convents in England.

Her aunt, Lady Bedingfeld, was boarding with the Benedictines at Hammersmith ; and Laura, when in London, was fond of driving over, with some brother or cousin, to brighten her weary hours of solitude and incipient blindness. On the return journey she often called on the Nuns of the Good Shepherd, and these visits gave rise to some teasing on the part of her companions, as to the Reverend Mother's designs upon her person and property. Laura always replied, and truthfully, that she had no intention of joining that Congregation.

But as time went on, and her desire of entering religion increased in intensity, the chances of finding her ideal sisterhood seemed more and more remote. Every Superior to whom she presented herself in the light of a possible postulant showed the utmost readiness to admit her to an immediate trial ; and this very alacrity she attributed to her possession of a

substantial dower. Humility in this case was responsible for the rash judgment. Her income was doubtless the reverse of a drawback ; but others could see, if she did not, that the rare combination of sterling qualities which made her a success in the world would render her, even if penniless, a treasure to any religious Order.

Before the close of 1848 she paid a two months' visit to Amiens, where she could talk freely of present perplexities and plans for the future, with Madame Dréville, once her governess and always her sympathetic friend. She made a retreat at the Sacré Cœur, under the Abbé de Brandt, and visited various communities in the environs. But nowhere could she hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit gently whispering "Come !"

She was back in England betimes for Christmas, and had some serious talks with Father de Held at Clapham. This good priest seems to have looked upon her doubts and repugnances as, possibly, signs that God intended her to remain in the world, free to lend herself to any good work that came under her notice, and yet enjoying the benefit of that true guidance in return for loving obedience which, according to Carlyle, is the prime need of every human soul.

And so he introduced her to the " Filles du Saint Cœur de Marie."

## CHAPTER XI

### LES FILLES DE MARIE

“The old order giveth place to new,  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways.”

TENNYSON.

THROUGHOUT the history of the Church, since the days of its Divine Founder, we find, ministering to the ministers of the Word, devout women, such as St. Paul praises in his Epistle to the Philippians, “who have laboured with me in the Gospel, and whose names are written in the Book of Life.”

Such a woman was the Marquise de Saisseval, sur-named in her youth “La céleste Saisseval,” for her virtue was as conspicuous as her beauty and wit at the Court of Marie Antoinette. She was admitted to the friendship of the King’s sister, Madame Elisabeth, and joined that saintly princess and other ladies in a union of prayer and good works, to obtain from God, through the most pure Heart of Mary, the preservation of religion in France. In 1789 the members agreed to set aside, every month, a certain sum for some pious purpose, the nature of which was to be specified at the end of a year. When the twelvemonth had elapsed, the fund thus saved secured against starvation many priests whose consciences refused the oath prescribed by the *Constitution Civile du Clergé*. Throughout the hardships entailed upon them by the Revolution,



Madame Elisabeth's friends struggled gallantly to keep up their contributions.

Madame de Saisseval had little money to spare, with an aged mother, an invalid husband, and seven young children dependent on her exertions for a livelihood in a foreign land. But the prayer was constantly on her lips :

" O my God ! preserve the Faith in my country, and let my children always serve Thee ! "

Her little room in London became a centre where a few émigrées of her own class met for work and mutual encouragement. " We painted miniatures," she tells us, " plaited straw hats, embroidered gowns, and made about two shillings an hour when we did not talk."

Lady Jerningham, Laura's grandmother, valued highly the friendship of Madame de Saisseval. She paid for one of her daughters at the Convent School at Bury, and often invited the whole family down to Costessey for rest and change of air. There is a touching anecdote of the poor marquise, weeping bitterly after her husband's death. The impossibility of procuring suitable mourning garments was the last drop overflowing her cup of sorrow, and her eldest girl, Aline, seemed to guess it by instinct.

" Don't cry, dear mamma," she said soothingly. " The Blessed Virgin has sent me such a good idea ! Let us sell the pretty dresses Lady Jerningham gave us, and then we shall have money to buy black ones."

More hopeful days dawned when Napoleon came to power ; and in 1801 Madame de Saisseval secured a portion of her husband's estates. Four of her children were by this time dead, two of the girls soon made suitable matches, and Aline found happiness helping her mother in the various charities to which her life was henceforth devoted.



The survivors of Madame Elisabeth's little company soon rallied round the marquise, "to take up again their first works." By Napoleon's Concordat their little fund was set free to establish a home for foundlings, under her active supervision. Moreover, the needlework guild of these *ci-devant émigrées* realized between a thousand and sixteen hundred pounds a year. So other good works were started in rapid succession, and the Archbishop of Paris and his priests found in these ladies trustworthy and resourceful auxiliaries in the emergencies created by the altered conditions of the times. Indeed, it was the services thus rendered to the Church in France which won from Pius VII. the comforting assurance :

"Faith is never extinct where charity survives ; and in a nation where such charity lives there is always hope of God's efficacious mercy."

In the economy of the Catholic Church, pious associations, formed to supply some need peculiar to the age, usually develop into religious institutes. So was it with Madame de Saisseval's little band of workers. But with the French Revolution still vivid in their memories, it was agreed that each should practise, in the privacy of her own home, the virtues characteristic of a life consecrated to God by the Vows of Religion. Each dressed simply, but in a manner suited to her rank in life, followed a rule adapted to her individual circumstances, and looked upon her income, whether large or small, as "just enough to live on, and as much as possible to give away."

The religious spirit was renewed at frequent intervals by retreats in specified localities, where some of the members lived together and formed the nucleus of a community.

Such was the origin of the Filles du Saint Cœur

de Marie, known in England as the " Filles de Marie," when early in 1848 (perhaps in consequence of the February Revolution), one of their number, Miss Prestwich, came to live with some companions in a house at Clapham, which they named " St. Anne's Retreat."

Holy Clapham, as it is styled in Early Victorian literature, was at that time considered the stronghold of Dissenting sects. There were fifty schools in the district, but not one for Catholics. So bitter was the bigotry that two Redemptorist Fathers, who settled there about the same time as Miss Prestwich and her companions, were pelted with mud when they appeared in the streets. But the sons of St. Alphonsus recked little of the mud : they found in Clapham a fair field in which to exercise their zeal. There were hundreds of Catholics in their mission, ready to shed blood in defence of their faith, but so ignorant of its doctrines and practice that, not to risk absolution, the Fathers had to teach the rudiments of religion in the confessional itself.

Soon the two Redemptorists could not cope with the work, and their Provincial ordered the Fathers stationed at Falmouth to come to their relief. Before the end of the year these were followed by the colony of Sisters of Notre Dame, who had been their helpers in the little Cornish town of Penryn.

" Three communities in a twelvemonth ! Sure some Saint has been praying hard for Clapham !" wrote Sister Clarie, Superior of the last-named religious family. And that cordial relations existed from the first among the three is clearly shown in a letter which she addressed to her Mother-General at Namur, just a month before leaving Penryn:

" On arriving at Clapham our Fathers made the

acquaintance of the Daughters of the Holy Heart of Mary, a society established in France about forty years ago. These good religious, who dress as seculars, devote their lives to such good works as other nuns cannot readily undertake. During the few months they are in Clapham they have gathered together about fifty Catholic little girls whom they are extremely anxious to put under our care. They have been to Dr. Wiseman about it, and he, too, sees how much good Sisters of Notre Dame might do, not merely by teaching in the schools, but also by establishing work-rooms, where children of a larger growth may learn how to earn a living, without being forced to seek situations with non-Catholics, where they are in great danger of losing their souls. These good Filles de Marie have taken us up very warmly. They promise to recommend our Boarding School to their friends in France, and have kindly offered to look us out a suitable house. They are willing to procure for us any information we may want about the neighbourhood, and have invited me to stay at their house if I go to London to arrange matters beforehand. As they have no distinctive habit, they are in a position to do an immense amount of good. They are especially desirous of helping priests and other nuns.

The coming of the Sisters of Notre Dame gave the Filles de Marie leisure to take up new works of mercy which brought them much in contact with the Redemptorist Fathers. It is no wonder that Father de Held, admiring the excellent results achieved by these ladies, should think their elastic rule exactly suited to Mrs. Petre's temperament and circumstances. Laura herself was so far attracted by their mode of life as to wish to study it more closely. At any rate, she broke up her establishment at Wilton Crescent, and engaged

apartments at St. Anne's, which became for her a convenient *pied-à-terre* during her brief business visits to London.

But the more she went among the poor and studied the best means of relieving their necessities, the deeper grew her conviction that their greatest need was an education, Catholic and thorough. She frequently at this time expressed her earnest desire to befriend and encourage any teaching order of nuns who would devote themselves to the instruction of poor children in the towns and hamlets of England.

Why, then, it may be asked, did not her new friends direct her attention to the Sisters of Notre Dame? A search through Sister Clarie's letters reveals the fact that at least one attempt had been made to effect an introduction. On the 21st of April, 1849, she wrote to her Mother-General :

"The Redemptorist Fathers at Great Marlow ask us to go there. The gentleman who has built their church, and pays for the support of two Fathers and a lay-brother, wants Sisters for the poor-schools, and offers a furnished house and ample provision for the needs of three Sisters. Shall we accept ?

"Father de Buggenoms says : ' It is the Will of God that the Sisters of Notre Dame should spread in England.'

"I say : ' We have too few Sisters here !'

"He says : ' New foundations are the way to develop vocations.'

"I must add a little secret. A very rich lady of high position intends befriending an institute (could she but discover one) devoted to the instruction of the poor. I have been told this in confidence ; and at the same time I have received a hint how to act, when portionless girls, showing signs of a good vocation,

apply for admission. Our Fathers want us to be better known. They think it would do much good if they can show that we are willing to settle in poor missions. . . .

“ The old priest at Virginia Street says he *expects* Sisters of Notre Dame in six or nine months’ time. The Irish Christian Brothers there are anxious to have us. They have the Boys’ School in good order ; but there is only one mistress for the girls, and she finds it impossible to cope single-handed with a hundred and fifty pupils. They say there are a thousand Catholic children in the neighbourhood, running wild in the streets and worse than savages, with no means of Catholic instruction.”

Great Marlow is near to Danesfield, where Mrs. Petre (the rich lady referred to) had just been staying with her niece ; and her diary shows that during her visit she had been much interested in the schools then being built. But Sister Clarie was not very keen on Great Marlow. Virginia Street, with its thousand poor children “ worse than savages ” appealed far more strongly to this daughter of Blessed Julie Billiard. There was difficulty in this case to find funds as well as Sisters, but she argued simply :

“ God will send means if He finds that the Sisters of Notre Dame gain Him souls.”

So the opportunity of a personal introduction was let slip. Laura, however, heard enough about the Sisters to resolve, before making her final decision, to visit their Mother House at Namur, as well as Madame de Saisseval’s establishments in and round Paris. Sister Clarie, looking upon her in the light of a possible benefactress, writes on the 16th of May :

“ Mrs. Petre, the rich lady about whom I told you, is going on the Continent, and intends visiting Namur.



Be sure you show her in detail our poor-schools, and the atelier where young girls are taught how to earn their living."

But the visit to Namur did not take place, and a series of *contretemps* delayed the journey to Paris till the autumn. When Laura's relations received an inkling of her intentions, they expressed marked disapproval of an obscure foreign institute limited to teaching. Lady Lovat, in particular, strongly urged her sister—if she *must* enter religion—to choose the Filles du Saint Cœur de Marie, for with them she could continue all the good works so happily begun, and undertake new ones, without altogether depriving her family and friends of the pleasure of her occasional visits, or of the cheery comfort of her ministrations in time of sickness or bereavement.

As if to give point to this argument, their brother Edward fell dangerously ill that summer. Laura nursed him tenderly till his death, and then had to spend a long month at Costessey for the consolation of her widowed sister-in-law.

At last in September (1849) she started for Paris with Miss Prestwich and Madame Dréville. Here she made the acquaintance of Madame de Saisseval, then in her eighty-sixth year: bowed down by old age, "that malady for which there is no cure, but with all her faculties alert and vigorous, her grace of mind equalled by her charm of heart," Laura had ample opportunity to examine the work of the association in its various departments, and by the time she reached England she had quite made up her mind to apply for admission at St. Anne's Retreat.

"It was the mixed character of the life which attracted her at first," notes Madame Dréville, "and it was this, too, which in the end repelled her." She



needed a more decided withdrawal from the world, more personal contact with her Sisters in Religion, and daily dependence on the wishes of a Superior.

Immediately on her return, Laura started on a series of good-bye visits. First there was a month at Beaufort Castle, the Highland home of the Lovats, then a few days with the De Lisles at Grâce-Dieu Manor, Leicestershire.

Mrs. de Lisle was her cousin and former school-fellow, and her husband, Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle, was a man sufficiently remarkable in his day to figure in one of Disraeli's novels. Divine Grace, working on his "sensitively logical mind," made a Catholic of him while still a schoolboy at Eton. Later he became one of God's immediate instruments for the conversion of the first English Passionist, Father Ignatius Spencer. He had already built three Gothic churches on his estates, and Mrs. Petre now offered to give one of the stained-glass windows in the domestic chapel, which was just finished, at Grâce-Dieu, in honour of the Blessed Sacrament. Mr. de Lisle was also the founder of the Cistercian Abbey in Charnwood Forest, not far from his home, and thus Laura was able to have a parting interview with her former pastor at Chelsea, Father Sisk.

The following letter was written soon after her return to London :

" ST. ANNE'S,

" December 13th, 1849.

" MY DEAR MR. PHILLIPPS,

" I take the first spare moment I have been able to find to thank you for your kind, amiable letter which was almost like a continuation of my agreeable visit to Grâce-Dieu. I cannot tell you how much real and lasting pleasure this afforded me, and with what

satisfactory feelings I shall ever recur to it. It was such a happiness to be in a really Christian home, and to see your efforts to promote our holy Faith crowned with so much success.

“ Our conversation that last evening did pain me, and yet I felt that, if your suffering was from God, your lot was to be envied. You have proved yourself so faithful a servant that I think this must be the case. But I am quite confused, as I was that night, to find myself, a complete neophyte in such matters, talking and almost advising about them ! I could only repeat to you what has given me comfort in times of trial, which we all go through some time or other. And this leads me to suggest to you, in such moments of misery as you described, to cast off all thought of yourself and your feelings, and to turn your thoughts to the infinite felicity of the Almighty. The *abstraction* of self caused by this reflection is of great relief, even without taking into account that the act of complacency in the happiness of God is in itself a meritorious act, and thus you will perform an act of charity to yourself as well as an act of the love of God. I wonder at my presumption in thus advising you ; but you appeared so unhappy, that I cannot help making an endeavour to suggest comfort.

“ I was very glad to renew my intimacy with your dear wife, and to find her, as you truly said, a saint ! Your joint efforts and devotedness to the cause must draw down the blessing of God on yourselves, and on the country you are trying to Catholicize.

“ Laura has perhaps told you of the step I am about to take. I hope that you will pray for me. This association does not cut off all intercourse with friends, so that I hope we shall meet again, if it please God.

“ I must beg you to have no scruple about the glass

for the window in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. I fully appreciate the delicacy of your making me reconsider the matter. I have done so ; and as I never act without advice, you must give me the pleasure of making this offering to your dear little church, where I spent so many happy hours.

“ I was so sorry that I gave you De Montfort’s book to read. In matters of devotion, I believe we should select what suits us, and not force anything.”

The round of visits ended with Costessey, where a touching scene took place between Laura and her aged father. Kneeling at his feet, she craved his blessing on her future career, assuring him, at the same time, that if he saw fit to withhold his consent, she should look upon his disapproval as a sign from God that she should desist from her design — so sure was she of Lord Stafford’s single-hearted generosity in God’s service, so diffident, perhaps, as to whether she was really acting in obedience to a higher call !

Possibly the sudden readiness of her friends to acquiesce in her departure may have opened her eyes to the partial nature of her sacrifice, and made her fear lest she might have been unduly, albeit unwittingly, biassed in her decision by the counsel of flesh and blood. The doubts resolved themselves into a certainty during the retreat which she began immediately on her return to St. Anne’s. After a general confession to Dr. Wiseman, it became very clear to her that God wanted her elsewhere.

Still all her aspirations, confused and explicit, continued, as throughout her widowhood, to point steadily and more and more definitely to the religious life. Immediately after her husband’s death, as we have noted, she consecrated herself to God by a Vow of

Perpetual Chastity. Six months later, after a retreat at Amiens under the Abbé de Brandt, she added the practice of bodily penance, and bound herself more closely to the Divine Service by other vows—to be renewed at stated intervals—of Obedience to her Confessor, and of Poverty. The latter was a favourite virtue of hers. She practised it in minute detail, rarely buying anything for her personal convenience, and exhibiting a marked predilection for darns and patches in her underwear. And now, though she was careful to inform Miss Prestwich of the change in her plans, she acquiesced with alacrity in that lady's suggestion that she should join the community in their devotions, meals, and simple recreations, thus becoming familiar with religious routine, while holding herself in readiness for some positive manifestation of God's designs in her regard.

Father de Held was doubtless not a little disappointed at the failure of his pet scheme. But he was far too versed in spirituality not to add his *Fiat* to the hearty *Deo Gratias* which Laura inserted in her diary after briefly recording Dr. Wiseman's decision that she should not cast in her lot with the Filles de Marie. But the good Father could not help her in this crisis of her career except by his prayers. By a delicacy of Divine Providence it was through the medium of almsgiving that light was at last to reach her soul.

Not far from St. Anne's Retreat, the Sisters of Notre Dame at Bedford Row were a hundred pounds short of their half-year's rent. And so, while the community varied their customary appeals to St. Joseph and St. Anthony by a fervent novena in honour of *Brother Gerard*, the St. Gerard Majella of our own day, their very good friend, Father de Buggenoms, sallied forth, to represent their hard case to the charit-

ably disposed among his moneyed acquaintance ; and Mrs. Petre was the very first to whose liberality he made appeal.

So skilfully did he plead his cause—he had been bred a barrister—and so favourable was the impression produced by his saintly mixture of asceticism and homely shrewdness, that Laura soon made up her mind on two points : she would choose this holy and experienced religious for her spiritual adviser ; and she would lose no time in becoming personally acquainted with the community whom he esteemed worthy of such unstinted praise.

“ Since their coming to England,” he told her, “ these Sisters have lived a life of poverty and crosses, in prayer and confidence in God. I have suffered with them, so I know what I am talking about.”

The following chapter is intended to justify the truth of this assertion.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SUCCESS OF FAILURE

“L'esprit des membres de l'Association est un esprit de simplicité, d'obéissance et de charité ; et leur désir est de consacrer leurs soins aux pauvres des lieux les plus abandonnés.”—*Rules and Constitutions of the Sisters of Notre Dame.*

THE Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame was founded in the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Blessed Julie Billiart, to diffuse the blessings of Christian education, and to repair as far as possible the damage inflicted on Society by the French Revolution. It forms a compact and united organization under a Superior-General who resides at the Mother House at Namur in Belgium. She it is who regulates the affairs of the various foundations, and has power to remove Sisters from one house to another, when circumstances render this expedient.

In 1843, when Rev. Mother Constantine was elected to this office, the numerous convents of the Institute in Belgium enjoyed a high reputation as educational establishments and religious communities ; and already the first pioneers among its foreign missionaries had knelt, before crossing the Atlantic, to receive the blessing of the Papal Nuncio at Brussels, Monseigneur Pecci, better known in a later generation as His Holiness Leo XIII.

Two years after her election, Mère Constantine



received applications for Sisters from England—one from Norwich, and one from Father de Buggenoms, Superior of the Redemptorists at Falmouth. The Norwich priests abode by her refusal; but Father de Buggenoms persevered in his request, undeterred by the manifest reluctance of the Namur authorities, or by such heavenly encouragement as would have daunted a spirit cast in less heroic mould. Let us listen to his own version of the story, in a letter written to his Provincial, before the actual foundation at Penryn :

“The object of my journey to Paris, besides my business with Propaganda, was to make a pilgrimage to Notre Dame des Victoires, so as to find out, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, who always hears my prayers, whether it was really the Will of God that I should establish a community of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Cornwall. Although the house was already bought, nothing had yet been definitely decided. The Bishop of Namur, spiritual Superior of the Sisters, had been strongly opposed to the Foundation, and only gave way in deference to the wishes of the Reverend Mother-General. Many prayers were offered, novenas were made by the Carmelites and other religious communities, and all these holy souls were in favour of the project. As soon as I reached Paris I asked leave from the venerable curé, M. Desgenettes, to say Mass every day at the shrine of Our Lady of Victories, and he gladly granted my request. I then besought the Blessed Virgin to let me hear interiorly, but in a way that I could not mistake, what was God’s Will in this matter. Day after day the same answer was given me : ‘ This Foundation must be made, although it will not succeed.’ ”

Once the Will of God was made clear, the zealous Redemptorist threw himself heart and soul into an

enterprise which he knew beforehand would end in failure. Not a word did he breathe at Namur of Our Lady's message; and in blissful ignorance of its import the little band of Sisters embarked with him at Ostend. They anticipated hardships indeed in their Cornish surroundings, but also a plentiful harvest of souls. There were six of them in all: Sister Clarie, the Superior, four other professed Sisters—of whom only one, Sister Marie Adèle, could express herself in English—and a talented little Irish novice, Sister Marie Borromée. In those days nuns did not venture abroad in England "in the habit of their order," so each wore a coloured shawl over her gown, and a bonnet, with a white tulle border and a long veil, over the black skull-cap coming half-way down her forehead. There was truly some excuse for the uncomplimentary paragraph which appeared in a local newspaper a few months after their arrival at Penryn:

"Six Belgian women, all as ugly as can be—not one worth looking at—are turning our town upside down, and there is no going to Heaven in peace since they have come."

A more friendly attitude was adopted by the Customs officers at the London Docks, where their eccentric appearance only aroused respectful pity, not unmingled with admiration; and the simple statement, "We are nuns going to teach poor children in Cornwall," was enough to pass, duty-free, their slender stock of household and scholastic chattels.

On Saturday, November 15th, 1845, they reached Penryn, a picturesque little town, with houses built in tiers on the slope of a hill overlooking Falmouth Harbour. The convent stood on the very summit: an ugly building, but with a flat roof commanding a magnificent prospect, rural and marine, and with



PENRYN CONVENT



gardens, stocked with fruit-trees, extending downwards to within a few feet of the sea. To the right, across the water, was Falmouth with its Catholic Chapel, served since 1843 by Redemptorist Fathers of the Belgian Province.

A French émigré priest had built this chapel fifty years before, and though damp and otherwise inconvenient, it was more than large enough to accommodate all the Catholics for miles around. But now it frequently happened that three-fourths of the people who presented themselves on Sundays could not find room, as Protestants flocked in crowds to listen to the Gregorian music.

“ If they are lured to Mass and even moved to tears,” Sister Clarie is careful to mention, “ all the credit is due to the intrinsic beauty of the plain-chant ; for the choir consists of myself and Sister Modeste, two nice little girls with rather pretty voices, and two men of good-will, whom Father de Buggenoms tries his hardest to keep in time and tune.”

The poor-schools in Penryn were opened in January, and enjoyed at first the unqualified approval of the townsfolk. The teaching was entirely gratuitous, the singing of French hymns an attractive novelty, and when the children rehearsed the day's proceedings in their homes (using the tongs for a signal), fathers and mothers could not help contrasting the gentle yet effective discipline of the Sisters, with the rough-and-ready methods in the Methodist sixpenny class-rooms.

It was not long before the grown-ups began to feel ashamed of their ignorance ; and even married women attended the Sunday-school, where not only were reading and singing correlated with religious instruction, but such purely secular subjects as writing and arithmetic received their quota of attention.



Another important innovation was the establishment of a workroom. Sister Clarie, accustomed to Belgian thrift and orderly behaviour, could not endure to see young girls frittering away their days in idle gossip for lack of employment in their own homes, so a sewing-class was opened for their benefit. Here, from eight in the morning until seven at night, on weekdays, an attempt was made to refine and elevate their minds, while they mastered the intricacies of lace-making, and earned a little money for themselves by fine needle-work for the London shops.

Meanwhile the Sisters' own finances were never very flourishing. They had few paying pupils, whether boarders or day-scholars; and besides the ordinary items of household expenditure there was a heavy outlay for the purchase and upkeep of convent and grounds; and an elementary school had to be built at the end of the garden. Father de Buggenoms made more than one begging expedition on their behalf, and Mr. Petre was among the first to respond generously to his appeal. The Carmelites at Lanherne also helped, not only by constant prayers and frequent cheery letters, but occasionally also by a gift out of their own slender resources.

On the whole, the weight of poverty pressed but lightly on the Penryn community. There were conveniences to be done without, hardships in plenty to laugh over in recreation; and it behoved them to practise the most rigid economy. But somehow they managed to keep clear of debt, they never wanted for actual necessities, and the food, both in quantity and quality, came as near as possible to the standard set by Namur. It is true that Father de Buggenoms stipulated from the beginning, that if any fasting had to be done his Fathers should be the ones to do it, and he



gave Sister Clarie strict injunctions to send on to the presbytery any bills she found it difficult to meet.

The chivalrous charity of the sons of St. Alphonsus was, throughout the nuns' stay in Cornwall, an immense help and comfort to them. In all weathers—rain or snow, storm or fog—one or other of the two Fathers trudged each morning round the bay and up the hill, that the Sisters might never miss their daily Mass at seven o'clock. In all emergencies Father de Buggenoms was to the fore, with shrewd advice and enlivening humour, while the Sisters were strengthened, amid the difficulties they encountered, by his broad-minded direction in the confessional, and the simplicity of his lofty ideals. Trust in the Fatherly love of Almighty God was the virtue on which he laid most stress in his dealings with souls; "Love God and do as you like," his favourite bit of advice. And the reasons he adduced in support of his axiom did not tend to make his penitents sluggish and indifferent in the pursuit of Christian perfection.

He enjoyed quoting to the Sisters the article of their Holy Rule at the head of this chapter, and was careful to point out how their corner in Cornwall was an ideal spot to satisfy the legitimate cravings of every true-hearted daughter of Blessed Julie. In the previous generation Penryn had been notorious for ignorance and political venality, and its name was a byword in the Reform debates as a "rotten borough."

Great religious apathy prevailed before the Redemptorists came. "I have no wish to change my religion," said one man to Father de Buggenoms.

"Well, but study your religion, my good sir; study your religion, for at present you know nothing about it." The retort was courteous and incontrovertible.

At first no objection was made when the little ones

learnt our doctrines and practised our devotions ; although one mother tried to prevent her girl from praying to Our Lady, on the curious plea that God meant His holy ones to enjoy a rest up in heaven, and it was, to say the least, inconsiderate, to worry them about our petty private concerns.

As time went on, minds began to reflect, and a few hearts opened to the pleadings of grace. There were baptisms in the Convent Chapel, and the solemn ritual of the burial service in the little corner of the grounds set apart as a Catholic cemetery.

“ All that fuss for a pauper’s funeral ! ” said the onlookers, amazed that such pains should be deemed worth while when there was no prospect of a tangible reward.

But soon the Nonconformist conscience took alarm, and pulpits rang with coarse and ignorant invective against both priests and nuns, to the no small disgust of those who had personal knowledge of the accused. The doctrines of the Catholic Church were left severely alone ; for the two Redemptorists were known to be trained experts in theological argument, and the intellectual attainments of the “ six ugly Belgians ” were rated very highly after the youngest among them (and she an Irishwoman !) had emerged victorious from the hour and a half of religious controversy, which was thrust upon her by the local dentist, before he inserted his forceps between her jaws !

No means were left untried to hinder the children from attending our schools. Even physical violence was employed, till at last the Mayor had to warn one of the preachers that England was a free country. For several consecutive Sundays a policeman was stationed, by his orders, at the convent gate to insure peaceable ingress to the scholars.

Opposition schools were started. This was open and above-board competition. But the parents were bribed to send their children thither—the younger ones to learn, and the elder girls, who had been some time under the Sisters' care, to introduce the nuns' methods, even to the singing of the French *cantiques*.

Sister Clarie had submitted with patient equanimity to the fancy prices, short measure, and adulterated articles imposed on her in the shops. But she stood aghast in righteous indignation at the deliberate traffic in children's souls and intellects, and she relates with pained disgust how parents owned unblushingly that they withdrew their children from us, simply because they were paid to send them elsewhere. When the money fell into arrears, back the children were brought with many fair speeches.

“The little one cried so to come.”

“Silence is kept between the lessons here. At the other school they were picking up bad words.”

“*You* do not hit the children,” etc.

Then, after a few days' attendance, the Methodist payments would be renewed. And so the game of fast and loose went merrily on!

Anecdotes of fanatic bigotry abound in Sister Clarie's letters to Namur, but in no case does she name her tormentors or give a clue to their identity.

There were crosses of other kinds—easier to bear, perhaps, because less imputable to human malice. The infirmary was rarely empty throughout the three years; and the Sisters, already overworked, had to nurse the invalids and replace them in their charges. Then God permitted the enemy of mankind to let loose his fury on one of the humblest and most zealous of the little band, by appearing to her in visible shape to delude or terrify. “She makes very good acts of vir-

tue," said Father de Buggenoms, who observed the phases of the obsession with the eye of a connoisseur. But often in the dead of night did the motherly Superior creep to the bedside of her afflicted child, to find her "fighting, even in her sleep, as if she had all the sins of Penryn upon her shoulders."

Such "dealings with the devil" had no terrors for Sister Clarie, though her sensitive soul shrank with horror from the least shadow of an offence against God. The ill-health in her community she looked upon as an invaluable means for cementing charity, and for revealing and developing unsuspected talent. She grieved, it is true, for the thwarting of her plans to promote God's interests and extend His Kingdom; and not the least bitter ingredient in her cup of sorrow was the fear lest her Superiors should recall the little colony from the field not yet ripe for the harvest.

It was impossible to maintain the struggle once the Redemptorists received orders to leave Falmouth; so the Sisters welcomed gladly Dr. Wiseman's invitation to rejoin them in his diocese, and sanction from Namur was readily obtained to remove to Clapham. On the 17th of September, 1848, the bulk of the party took boat at Falmouth for London. Father de Buggenoms smiled as he saw them off, and playfully knocked his shoes one against the other, as if to remind them of the Gospel text: "Whosoever shall not receive you or hear your words, going out of that city, shake off its dust from your feet."

But the hearts of the travellers were at that hour very full. They had grown deeply attached to this poor mission, where they had laboured and suffered "in much patience, in prayer, and in mutual charity," and they left the handful of Catholics without permanent means of religious instruction. Our Lady's

words had indeed come true : the *Foundation did not succeed* ; but in the light of the subsequent history of Notre Dame in England we can see reason why, even from a human point of view, *it had to be made*.

Sister Clarie was a clever woman, a fervent religious, and an experienced Superior, when she first landed on our shores ; but Penryn gave her, as she expresses it, " quite another idea of God." Her letters lay bare her inmost soul : its weaknesses, its darknesses, and the secrets of its strength ; her unremitting endeavours to attract hearts to Christ, and to render her own heart more pleasing in His Divine eyes. In appearance she was somewhat masculine, and her virtues, too, were of a virile type. Confessor and Superiors found it possible and advantageous to allow her to make a vow—such as St. Teresa made—always to do that which before God appears most perfect. She was a true mother to her little community ; and such was the good understanding between herself and her subjects that she could handle their faults without gloves, and they came to her as a matter of course in all their joys and troubles, sure of effective sympathy and sound advice. But English ways and English language took time to learn, and the vagaries of the English temperament proved at first a disheartening puzzle. Three years in remote Cornwall was not too long an apprenticeship for one chosen by God to establish the Institute of Notre Dame in England, and to take such a prominent part in the training of its Superiors.

In a fervent, hardworking, and well-instructed community it sometimes happens that the chaplain's chances of gauging the virtue of the inmates are limited to the weekly confessions, with an average length well inside two minutes. To give a case in point :



Father de Held was ordinary confessor to the Sisters in Bedford Row for a year and a half, without realizing how admirably suited were the spirit and aims of Notre Dame to the temperament of his other penitent, Mrs. Petre. But it was in the nature of things that the gallant struggle in the teeth of failure should have knit, in close bonds of fellowship and mutual esteem, the two religious families in Falmouth and Penryn, and have thus initiated the long series of spiritual services rendered by Father de Buggenoms to the daughters of Blessed Julie Billiart. As first-fruits of his direction, we may reckon ten fervent postulants from the environs of Penryn, five of whom entered the Institute before the migration to Clapham.

The first to receive the habit was Sister M. Alphonse de Liguori, a well-educated young girl. Her mother was a De Magelhaen from Lisbon, and her father a De Paiva from Brazil ; yet Sister Clarie mentions her as "an Englishwoman with nothing English about her," as well as "the proper stuff out of which to fashion a Sister of Notre Dame."

Sister Barbe's talents were of another order. She was a Belgian who had been a cook in Cornwall for some years, and one would think that her local experience and grasp of two languages would have been very useful in the struggling community. But her age was against her—she was twenty-nine—and Sister Clarie judged it well to have her vocation tested at the Mother-House. On her arrival at Namur, she caused much amusement by announcing herself as "Charlotte d'Angleterre."

Then there were three converts—Sister Marie du Sacré Cœur, Sister Mary Joachim, and Sister Marie Albanie, whom Sister Clarie calls "a child of obedience."



In the early days, both at Penryn and Clapham, there was little leisure to prepare lessons, and Sister Clarie was obliged, though regretfully, to allow each mistress to specialize in certain branches and teach them as far as possible to all the pupils. But she always preferred the *class-mistress* system, and pointed out, as an argument in its favour, that Sister Marie Albanie, with no special aptitude for study, taught all the subjects in her own class, and, thanks to the uniformity of discipline thereby insured, and notes and hints from her more gifted Sisters, her pupils were acknowledged by all to achieve the most satisfactory results.

Here it may be well to remark that the distinction between choir-sister and lay-sister has never existed in the Institute of Notre Dame. The Rule enjoins all to "help one another as sisters," and thus, as Mère St. Joseph explains it, "by mutual intercourse, some gain in humility, some in politeness, and all in charity." Each is put to the work for which she is fitted, and the list of charges fulfilled by the same individual is sometimes amusing in its variety. Thus, Sister Clarie begs from Namur for "a musical Sister with sturdy arms"—and so Sister Marie Eulalia came to England. She was a trained musician, and a practised expert in all domestic duties, and she became eventually Superior at Manchester for a long series of fruitful years.

The other music-mistress at Penryn, Sister Marie Alix, was the only one who could handle successfully the class of lacemakers. Her health was not very robust, but she was never so happy as when "pottering humbly" about household duties. She it was who opened the door to Mrs. Petre on the 20th of February, 1850. She had been expecting her since 1846. Let us listen to an extract from her deposition in the preliminary process for Blessed Julie's Beatification.

“Towards the end of November, 1846, I had a severe illness. Indeed, so ill was I that I received Extreme Unction, and the blessed candle was placed in my hand, while the community knelt around me to say the Prayers for the Dying.

“In the first days of this illness, Sister Superior told me I ought to pray to be cured by Christmas Eve, as the choir would need my services at Midnight Mass. And I did ask most earnestly this favour from Our Lady, through the intercession of our two venerated Foundresses and of dear Mère Ignace. Suddenly I saw Our Lady with the Divine Infant, Whom she placed in my arms, to my unspeakable joy and sweet consolation. She told me that the Doctor, a Protestant, would die a Catholic, and that I was to give him and each member of his family a Miraculous Medal. Father de Buggenoms has told me since that the Doctor really did become a Catholic.

“In this first apparition, Our Lady had with her our three Mothers : Mère Julie, Mère St. Joseph, and Mère Ignace. They were kneeling and in prayer. Ma Mère Julie turned to me with a smile.

“‘Daughter,’” she said, ‘you are not going to die now. You will have much to suffer yet, and many humiliations throughout your life.’

“A few days later I again saw the Blessed Virgin. She again gave me her Divine Son to hold, and left Him in my arms for above an hour. This time our three Mothers were each accompanied by a throng of people of diverse nations. Each of our Mothers seemed to follow a Cross, and all three were surrounded by light. Mère Julie’s Cross was the largest, and her lustre by far the most brilliant. She foretold to me that we should leave Penryn, but remain in England, and that an English lady, very pleasing in God’s sight, would

enter our Institute, and procure therein great glory to God.

“ Later on I happened to open the door when the Hon. Mrs. Petre called at our first convent in Clapham. I was deeply moved when she gave her name, for it flashed across me that this was the lady ‘pleasing in God’s sight,’ whose name up to that moment I had never been able to remember.”

In a third vision on Christmas Eve, Sister Marie Alix was shown the circumstances of her own instantaneous cure.

Details of the two first trances, from an onlooker’s point of view, occur in Sister Clarie’s letters to Namur. Thus, on the 27th of November, she writes :

“ Sister Marie Alix has received the Last Sacraments. She is always speaking of Jesus and Mary. ‘ Jesus, I offer my pain for the conversion of Protestants ! Mary, pray for Protestants ! ’ etc. She had to-day a sort of ecstasy, lasting for two hours. There she lay, her face radiant with joy, her hands lifted towards Jesus and Mary, whom she saw, she said, in ravishing loveliness. ‘ Oh, look ! look ! how beautiful is Mary ! If the Protestants could but know ! ’

“ When the Doctor came in : ‘ You, you Protestant, pray to Mary ! You, you must be converted, or else no heaven for you ! Won’t you pray to Mary ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’ he answered.

“ ‘ But will you do it from your heart ? ’

“ The Doctor says she may recover. She is better since the Last Sacraments, but still in delirium ! Such a happy delirium ! I am writing this at her bedside.”

Sister Clarie is careful not to commit herself as to the nature of these trances. “ But from whatever source they come they do good ”—for the sufferer is patient and humble, and her conversation impresses

the Sisters with a great esteem for obedience. Father de Buggenoms, "no partisan of extraordinary ways in spirituality," was away on a begging tour throughout the illness; but he came home in time to spend the night of Christmas Eve in the Convent, where he was to celebrate Midnight Mass.

Sister Marie Alix told him after confession, that if she received an order to play and sing during the Holy Sacrifice, obedience would give her the necessary strength. He thought she was raving; but after he had spent some time in silent prayer, he consulted with the Superior, and together they went to the infirmary, and told the invalid to follow her inspiration. "Get up and do as you like!" were the actual words of command.

She dressed, unaided, and came to the chapel, where she assisted at two Masses in succession, and, after an interval, at a third. Her voice rang out sweet and clear in the midnight *Gloria*, while the other Sisters, overcome with emotion, could only pour out their hearts to God in silent thanksgiving.

The cure, of course, was bruited abroad, but the prudent Superior took effectual measures that at least the events preceding it should remain "the secret of the King."

"Sister Marie Alix firmly believes that every dying person sees such things as she has seen. It seems to her that she can never refuse any sacrifice whatsoever to the good God. The most consoling thing about it all is her humility. She must keep in her littleness, unaware of the good opinion people might conceive of her; so I have warned the Sisters not to speak of the cure, nor of anything edifying they may have noticed during her illness. *And I know they won't.*"

"Lest it should harm the dear Sister," Sister Clarie

stified her own very legitimate curiosity, and refrained from questioning as to the details of the visions.

“She remembers very well all that she has seen and heard, and would tell me very readily all about it ; but I believe it safer that she should not suspect I attach any importance to such revelations.”

This attitude of aloofness was sanctioned and commended at Namur. Indeed, it was fully justified by a painful episode in the Annals of Notre Dame. Some twelve years previously, a series of illusory visions, tending to alter the whole character of the Institute, had resulted in loss of vocation to three of its members, and threatened destruction to the lifework of Blessed Julie.

It is highly probable, however, that Sister Marie Alix wrote full details in her New Year's letter to Mère Constantine. Doubtless, too, Father de Buggenoms contrived to question her discreetly, but he gives no hint of these wonderful happenings in the account of the miraculous cure which he drew up for the Society of the Propagation of the Faith at Lyons.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A LIFE'S DECISION

" Sweet is the Rose, but grows upon a brere ;  
Sweet is the Nut, but bitter is his pill ;  
Sweet is the Eglantine, but pricketh near,  
And sweet is Moly, but his root is ill. . . .  
Thus every sweet with sour is mingled still  
Which maketh it be coveted the more ;  
For easy things which can be had at will  
Most kind of men do set by little store.  
Why then should I account of little pain,  
That endless happiness for me doth gain ?"

VEN. R. SOUTHWELL, S.J.

THERE were some tangible results to show for their endeavours, when the Sisters of Notre Dame had been settled in Clapham for a year and a half.

The boarding-school was in a satisfactory condition. Isabella de Paiva and others of the Penryn pupils were there from the first, to give a Notre Dame tone to the new-comers. There were three distinct grades of day-scholars : " a mixture of laziness and independence," the new mistresses found them at first. " But what can we expect from children brutalized by the cane ?" was the indignant retort of the more acclimatized members of the teaching staff. The bulk of the work lay among Catholics, who, whether at day-school, night-classes for working girls, or Sunday meetings for matrons, drank in with avidity the doctrines and devotions of our holy religion.



Then there was a fair prospect of expansion. The Virginia Street Foundation had, indeed, to be given up, when the principal mistress intended for it died of cholera in the autumn of 1849. But the parishioners of St. Anne's, Blackburn, were depriving themselves of a meal a week to insure a maintenance for the Sisters who were to come to them in July. Two zealous Liverpool priests were pleading for Sisters of Notre Dame in their respective districts; and Manchester, "with *seventy-five thousand* Catholics, and never a convent," was appealing strongly to the apostolic instincts of Sister Clarie.

If only she had the means! The Sisters, "all good and virtuous" even in the eyes of their Superior, were still too few in number for the work they had in hand. Several promising young girls had indeed been received as postulants; but there were others, with signs of a good vocation, who had to be regretfully refused, for lack of the very modest sum required for their expenses during the two years' noviciate.

Oh, this wretched money! How it handicapped at every turn, and crippled all the efforts of her zeal! It was very hard to keep out of debt in London, where everything was so expensive, and where she could not, as at Penryn, pass on the impossible bills to Father Rector at the monastery. Frequent allusions to the Cash-Incubus occur in the early part of 1850.

"There are some bills I grumble at having to pay," she writes to Mère Constantine. "The pew-rent at the Anglican Church, for instance." And then follows a lucid if satirical account of the Poor Laws, as in those days administered. "The poor have a right to the workhouse, but prefer to beg," she concludes, "and the money goes in official salaries. Oh, if we had but the spending of it!"

But the chief and permanent anxiety was the annual rent—two hundred and thirty pounds—for the house in Bedford Row.

“The month of March is coming on, and the half-year’s rent to pay! St. Joseph and St. Anthony must do it between them! We have only fifteen pounds in hand.”

But Father de Buggenoms heard of their distress, and while the community “prayed might and main to Brother Gerard,” he sallied forth, as we have seen, in quest of the odd hundred.

For over a year had Father de Buggenoms been patiently awaiting a favourable opportunity to introduce Sister Clarie to Mrs. Petre. His appeal to the latter proved so successful, in more senses than one, that on the 26th of February we find her seated in the parlour at Bedford Row.

It was no easy matter to induce the Superior to come down. Her days were very full—fuller than usual just then, for a species of influenza was running through the community, and she herself was not fit to be out of bed. The name of her visitor would naturally suggest to her a renewed request for Sisters for Great Marlow, when she had none to spare. And if the portress, Sister Marie Alix, had the misfortune to remark, “She is the lady Ma Mère Julie mentioned to me at Penryn,” the chances of an interview were likely to be still further diminished.

But Mrs. Petre declined to state her business, save to the Superior in person, so at last the two came face to face.

Sister Clarie alluded briefly to the visit the next time she wrote to Mère Constantine, a fortnight later on March 14th. She had been confined to bed in the interim, and begins by answering inquiries anent “the

fever which has been hovering about me a long while, and has left me all the better for having been ill." Then she passes to "more consoling items"—seven baptisms lately, and more to follow after Easter! Sister Charles is preparing negligent Catholics for the Sacraments. "Her voice resounds through the house, and I keep sending her messages to moderate her zeal. How we all laugh, in recreation, when she bemoans her lack of fluency in English!" The poor-schools are now too small. Mrs. Petre has given Father de Held ground for a boys' school, which the Poor School Committee are helping him to build. He is willing to provide accommodation for the girls, and that would be the cheapest arrangement and the best; for the Sisters can now walk through the streets without risk of insult.

"I am coming now to the help which kind Providence has vouchsafed. The Hon. Mrs. Petre (whom I mentioned to you last year, *Ma chère Mère*, about Great Marlow) called here the other day, and inquired very kindly about the house. Knowing that she is well off, but with many claims upon her charity, I told her I had not half what was needed for the rent; and she promised me on the spot to make up the deficit, if I wrote to her a week beforehand, stating the exact amount required." Here follows a brief account of the *Filles de Marie* (Sister Clarie erroneously imagining that her visitor was one of them), and a hearty thanksgiving to the Heavenly Protectors, "who have, as usual, helped us out of our difficulty."

Disappointingly scanty are the references to Notre Dame in Laura's diary, and to Mrs. Petre in Sister Clarie's letters: just the bare statement, in both cases, that the promised hundred pounds were duly paid, and that two of Lady Bedingfeld's grandchildren had

come as boarders through the kind offices of their cousin.

During the first fortnight of March, Laura was in the sickroom of her niece, Mrs. Scott-Murray, and throughout April she was a guest at Costessey, where she saw a good deal of the Lovats and other near relatives. But Passiontide and May were spent in Clapham, where she missed no opportunity of seeing and hearing more of the community at Bedford Row, to which from her first visit she felt irresistibly drawn.

"No sooner had I crossed the threshold of the Convent," she owned later, "than a deep conviction took hold of me, that within its walls, and not elsewhere, I was to find peace of mind, and efficacious graces for salvation."

Father de Buggenoms spoke freely with her on the subject nearest her heart. But she found Sister Clarie reserved and reticent. It is a tradition in the Institute that, when she asked to be admitted as a postulant, she was answered bluntly :

"We don't take widows."

Sadly she told the Redemptorists of this rebuff. "Every door is open to me," she sighed, "except the one where I really wish to enter !"

Father de Buggenoms went straight to the Convent. "Sister Superior, whereabouts in your Rule is it forbidden to receive widows ?"

"Nowhere," was the reply. In point of fact no widows had ever applied for admission, and Sister Clarie had been taken by surprise at Mrs. Petre's request. Up to that moment she had never considered her as a possible postulant. She had, however, too much experimental knowledge of Father de Buggenoms' spiritual discernment in vocations to refuse

to examine seriously the reality of Laura's call to the religious state.

There followed a series of interviews, during which the prudent Superior took pains to emphasize those hardships incidental to the Congregation which were likely to have most weight with a pious lady of formed habits and far from robust in health, who was probably accustomed to having her own way in spirituals, as in temporals, amid an environment of refined comfort.

But upon certain characters, and those not the least energetic, opposition usually acts as a stimulant. Laura had deliberately chosen the path of sacrifice, and it was never her custom to do things by halves.

"Oh, why do you talk like that?" she protested. "Are you trying to deprive me of all hope of becoming a Sister of Notre Dame?"

Then, as she watched the Sisters going quietly and in silence about their respective duties, she echoed in heart the words of St. Augustine: "These can do it; why not I?" Aloud she said, turning to her companion with an arch smile:

"The real difficulty with me will be to restrain my happiness within the limits of religious decorum. When I find myself alone in my quiet cell, I shall dance for joy, as David did before the Ark!"

"Your cell?" came the freezing rejoinder. "Why, we have no cells! How will you manage if, as is quite possible, you find yourself in a dormitory with other Sisters?"

"All the better!" laughed Laura. "We shall take hands, and dance in a ring! The more the merrier, you know."

Sister Clarie's keen eye did not fail to detect the involuntary wincing, so bravely concealed under cover of a jest. Every day she was learning to appreciate



Laura better, and though she left it to the practised pens of the Redemptorist Fathers to urge upon Mère Constantine a favourable decision, we find her writing on the 6th of June :

“ How glad I am Mrs. Petre is at last accepted to try our way of life. So great a lady has, of course, a crowd of advisers ! She has now run off to a friend of hers at Amiens, so as to avoid the importunities of relatives and friends. Father de Buggenoms means to suggest to her, I think, to spend a few days, or even weeks, with you before returning to England. This lady has such a good spirit ! I do not think the humiliations of the noviciate will frighten her in the least ! But I can see she shrinks from the idea of not having a room to herself. I wish from the bottom of my heart her vocation may prove real. She would be a great acquisition for the Institute. I am not speaking of her fortune, but of her personal qualities : her mental superiority and the useful knowledge she has acquired. May God derive glory from it all ! ”

Before leaving England, Laura called at Burns and Lambert's, the well-known Catholic firm, to inquire which in their opinion was at that moment the most necessitous mission in London.

“ Islington ” was the prompt rejoinder. Then and there she made choice of a beautiful Monstrance, and drove off with it herself, well pleased that her customary love-gift to Jesus on the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament should this year insure her the special prayers of her valued friend, Canon Oakeley. He was, in fact, the illustrious Oxford convert whose ecclesiastical studies she had once made possible by a timely alms. His zeal and learning and personal example were now attracting many to the true Fold, and animating his flock to holiness of life.



Corpus Christi fell that year on the 31st of May, and it was on its morrow, the first Friday in June—the double anniversary, therefore, of Blessed Julie's miraculous cure—that Laura reached Amiens, the cradle of Notre Dame. As Sister Clarie hints, she had found it necessary to seek a space for solitude and quiet thought in the home of Madame Drévelle. Her change of plans was severely criticized by her friends. The sincerest and most disinterested among her well-wishers expressed doubts as to her perseverance in an obscure and struggling community, whose future prospects in England, according to its most enthusiastic upholder, “were just beginning to be no longer a mystery.” So far, it must be owned, she had received but scant encouragement within the Order itself, and once her formal request for admission had been forwarded to Namur, her own buoyant courage seemed of a sudden to collapse. A veritable hurricane of doubt clouded the serene atmosphere of her spirit, and amid the darkness thus created a host of difficulties, real and imaginary, rushed in to harass and perplex. She needed leisure and quiet to probe the inmost recesses of her own heart, and to pray with humble diligence that God would not withdraw His Guidance at this momentous crisis in her life, but so illuminate her understanding and inspire her will that she might have light and grace to choose and perform the thing most acceptable in His Divine Eyes.

She sought human help as well from her Redemptorist directors. Father de Buggenoms's letter in reply reveals to us the sources of her transient repugnance to the Congregation of Notre Dame. He takes high ground throughout, fully aware that he can safely appeal to the noble motives which usually actuate her conduct, and quite confident that her attraction

towards a hidden life of poverty, and her zeal for the needs of England, will eventually enrol her among the daughters of Blessed Julie.

*“ June 9th, 1850. .*

“ . . . It is not difficult to reply to your letter of the 7th inst, because I feel I can speak to you out of the fulness of my heart, and under the influence of the same Holy Spirit who communicates Himself to me in prayer.

“ On the Eve of the Sacred Heart, the 7th, ended the novena which I had induced the Sisters of Notre Dame to make, and on that day, too, all my doubts disappeared. I have been able ever since to ask of God, from the bottom of my heart, and without any hesitation, to give you all the graces necessary to make your decision with great generosity ; and I am quite sure you will decide on embracing the Rule of Notre Dame. What confirms me in this idea is that Sister Superior has experienced the same impression, even more forcibly than I have done, although it was she who, up to the present, has dissuaded me from taking measures to tell you what I tell you to-day, what I should have liked to tell you a year ago, if I had the chance. Truly there is a time for all things, and our good God is not always in such a hurry as we are ! His Ways are right, but not always within the compass of our puny intellects, and He leads us sometimes by roundabout ways, as of yore He led the Israelites to the Promised Land. Yet these roundabout ways are the straightest, even according to the rules of geometry, for they lead us most directly to our real end, the possession of His Kingdom.

“ Besides, Sister Superior, there is another Sister in whom I have great confidence, on account of the guilelessness of her life and her great love of truth ;



FATHER LOUIS DE BUGGENOMS, C.S.S.R.

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and this Sister, though she is still ignorant of the subject-matter of this novena, has assured me that I shall obtain what I am asking.

“ Now, the more I think of you before Our Lord, the more certain I am ; and I cannot even understand how I could have had doubts. In fact I see, on the one hand, that God calls you to serve Him in the religious state. Father de Held has told me that he is quite convinced of this, and that nothing could make him alter his opinion. On the other hand, I see, no less clearly, that there is no religious Order which corresponds more closely to the present needs of England than the Sisters of Notre Dame—nor one, I may add, more thoroughly in touch with the Redemptorists.

“ Then, when I consider *your* dispositions, and the species of vow you are under to devote that portion of this world's goods which Providence has entrusted to you, to help religious whose Rule seems best adapted to promote the interests of Catholicism in England ; when I consider your desire to consecrate yourself to God, and to remain in close touch with the sons of St. Alphonsus, it seems to me that your vocation to the Institute of Notre Dame is as clear as possible. The chief difficulty which I feared to meet, on the part of the Superior-General, no longer exists. I have faithfully told her all that might enlighten her about you, and she herself assures me that she believes your vocation to be a real one.”

Father de Buggenoms had probably had to justify at Namur Laura's quick change from Les Filles de Marie to the community at Bedford Row. He now proceeds to examine, point by point, her own objections to the life of a Sister of Notre Dame, not minimizing the difficulties, but elevating them to a higher plane.

“ Whatever may be the hardships which your friends think will frighten you, you will find them elsewhere in any fervent noviciate. Washing up and clearing away after meals ? That is done everywhere. One of our own Fathers takes his weekly turn serving at table, and another washes the plates. In our noviciate we had to peel potatoes, and do—no exemption possible—all the menial work about the house, in imitation of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, in the Holy House of Nazareth. I can assure you, from personal experience, that the sweetest consolations are enjoyed in the performance of such humble duties.

“ Would you feel repugnance at sleeping in the same room with two or three other Sisters ? There are hardly ever four, and often less than three cubicles in each ‘ dormitory.’ That may appear to you at first a difficulty. But afterwards it will be for you, as it has been for so many others, a source of consolation. It is especially a comfort during illness not to be alone in the night. It is certainly an advantage to have a room where you can go to collect your thoughts quietly now and again ; but you will find that each Sister, in her charge, has practically some little spot to which she can retire when she wants to be alone.

“ As for life in a community where there is no distinction between *choir* and *lay* Sister, I give you my word that is one of the biggest benefits, and one for which you will often thank God, when you have really entered on this way of Christian perfection. What are fervent religious Orders, if not a continuation of the life led by Christ with His Apostles ? Well, Our Lord chose His best friends among those who had fewest worldly advantages. St. Teresa remarks that it was St. Peter, illiterate and of mean birth, and not St. Bartholomew, the son of a prince, who was at the head of the infant Church.”



Next comes a bit of special pleading for Notre Dame, worthy of St. Francis of Assisi, and a good specimen of Father de Buggenoms' paradoxical line of argument.

"Why is it that in Belgium—which, considering its extent, has a great number of nuns and a large assortment of religious Orders—why is it, I ask, that the Sisters of Notre Dame are the most numerous and, in the opinion of good judges, the most fervent ?

"1. Because the service of the poor is, after their own sanctification, their principal object.

"2. Because they are themselves imbued with the spirit of poverty.

"I told you once that I loved the poor as much as I loved God, and you answered : ' That is saying a great deal.' Well, I repeat it again, and this time I am going to explain my meaning. The poor are a great mystery, the mystery of Jesus made Man for love of us. Poverty is, in a way, the Sacrament of the Incarnation, and, consequently, of our Redemption, for it is the outward sign of the inward grace which Christ came to bring to earth.

"Poverty is the Bride of Christ, but He has left her to us, that by espousing her we may become one with Him in Heaven, as it is by espousing her He became one with us on earth. In His jealous love, God wills that we strip ourselves of everything ; and our union with Him is in proportion to our detachment from all that is not Himself. This is why He proclaims ' Blessed are the poor in spirit,' and promises them in this world the Kingdom (that is to say, the Fulness of His Grace), whereas the other beatitudes have only attached to them the promise of *future* good. All the saints have understood this, and so all have shown themselves, more or less, desperate lovers of Holy Poverty, like the great St. Francis of Assisi. None of them have ever been as poor as they wished to be in

order to possess no treasure save God alone ! Poverty is a Queen, and her consorts reign with her, or rather with her Divine Bridegroom. In a word, to love poverty is to love nothing but God.

“ You will tell me, perhaps, that poverty may be embraced in any religious Order. That is true, but, according to St. Thomas’s definition, the most perfect religious Order is the one where, if the Rule be properly observed, we find the most efficacious means of attaining perfection. And I think that, as regards Holy Poverty, the Sisters of Notre Dame are second to none. I envy them many practices which we have not in our own Congregation.

“ But there is another point of view which I always think should be carefully considered, when it is a question of choosing an Order where we can most surely give glory to God and sanctify ourselves. I mean *discernment of times*. What is most perfect at one period is not so at another. Thus we see great saints founding, in diverse ages, religious Orders with diverse modifications, all closely corresponding to the needs of their day. Our Lord reproached the Jews that they knew not how to discern the signs of the times, and that was why they remained attached to the Synagogue, which had been, but no longer was, the most perfect Society on earth.

“ It is for this reason that, in the ordinary course of Divine Providence, each religious Order gives its greatest saints to the Church during the first century of its existence. I would cite as an instance St. Teresa and her companions, with her fellow-worker, St. John of the Cross and his. I do not, of course, mean to say that the Carmelites will cease from being till the world’s end cherished daughters of the Church, leading a life as intrinsically perfect as in the days of St. Teresa.

But I maintain that the greatest number of vocations are no longer now, as they were three hundred years ago, for the Contemplative Life. . . .

“ We must not regret the good works that might be accomplished in other Institutes. Each one of them is called to contribute to the regeneration of England ; but those which contribute most largely, and with most far-reaching results, are the Orders which specialize in education. If we can cover England with young healthy plants, the tares which have so long choked the good seed will not have room to propagate. That is why we must work at education, not merely of the poor, but of all classes. Rich and poor are closely connected in so many ways that, if there be no cohesive harmony of religious principles to bring them together, equilibrium will become impossible, and the evils of discord certain. Now education (I take the word in its widest extent and in all its branches) is precisely the work of the Sisters of Notre Dame. The children of the poor are the most numerous, and the poor are their chief care. After these come the middle-classes of Society ; and the children of the rich are the most incidental. They may always found a house, provided there are poor to teach : but they may not do so for the exclusive benefit of the well-to-do. They look after working-girls too, or women of any age, gathering them in evening-classes, or work-rooms, or Sunday-schools, according to local exigencies. What can be greater or more beautiful than such a life, including, as it does—to borrow Bossuet’s expression—all that is most sublime in heaven and on earth : Charity and Charity to God’s poor ?

Since the very outset of my career as a Redemptorist—for it was here I began it—my favourite prayer has been, as I have told you, to see flourishing in England

an Institute of nuns so well suited to the needs of the poor who are the great ones in the Household of the Faith. Many a time I have offered myself to suffer, and even to die, provided that this grace be granted to England, even were it after my death. . . . As often as I can I offer the Holy Sacrifice for this intention, and I cannot thank you too much for enabling me to gratify my devotion on this point. As you have explained to me, your principal intention is to obtain the light and strength necessary to dispose of your person and your goods in the manner best adapted to glorify God, by promoting the good of religion, especially the eternal interests of the poor in England. So it seems to me that in praying for your intention I am praying for my own, which is also that of many souls whom I know to be very pleasing to God, and to whom He has revealed His good pleasure in an undoubted manner, not only during the ordinary recollection of prayer, but also by communicating with them in extraordinary ways. Father Avila used to say he was almighty when he celebrated Mass and held in his hand the Spotless Victim of infinite price, by offering Whom we can obtain anything, especially anything pertaining to the Glory of God and the salvation of souls. . . . What confidence should we not have, when we hold in our hands Jesus Christ Himself, and offer Him to God His Father, by His own command, and with His infallible promise to be heard ?

“ I have not the time to tell you any more ; but I promise to go on praying, as I have done up to the present. I hope that you, too, will go on praying properly. The cause of all miseries is that people do not know how to pray aright, or, rather, will not do so : for who is there who cannot pray if he wants to do it ? . . .

“ When you have quite made up your mind, I should like you to pay a visit to the Reverend Mother of the Sisters of Notre Dame at Namur. If I mistake not, there is direct railway communication with Amiens. You could settle your business there as well as elsewhere ; and I believe that when you have sufficient light to trust in the Will of God, as I have expressed it to you in this letter, you must not hold back any longer ; because, when God takes a step towards us, He means us to take another towards Him, and often He stops and is silent in front of souls who have not responded with alacrity to His call. It might even happen that you could not do easily, later on, what it seems to me easy for you to do now. Be sure that I shall pray for you, after all is decided, as much as I do now, and with more consolation.

“ When you write to me, it is not necessary to mark on the address that the letter is for me alone. I have Father de Held's sanction to correspond with you, and that is enough. I always receive your letters closed.

“ I have offered Mass specially for the soul of your husband, as you desired, and I recommend Him every day in the Mass I say for your intention. I have also asked Father de Held and others to pray for him.

“ May Jesus and Mary be always with you and bless you, according to the desire of

“ Your devoted Father in Christ,

“ L. DE BUGGENOMS, C.SS.R.”

It required two more letters of almost equal length to substantiate certain statements in the above, and to clinch the argument, by detailed evidence, that no other Order, however fervent, so exactly suited her special needs and responsibilities. Then, too, attempts



had been made to weaken Mrs. Petre's trust in her director ; but perfect frankness, on both sides, prevented " the little rift within the lute " from widening into a breach which might have marred the harmony of her life.

It cost Laura to set down on paper the trifling accusations which were ruffling the surface of her soul ; but she realized the importance of probing a misunderstanding before the wound has had time to fester. It cost Father de Buggenoms to spend precious time justifying his conduct point by point ; but he felt she had a right to a full explanation. His concluding passage is so characteristic of the man that we cannot refrain from quoting it here :

" Doubtless you find me very diffuse in my own defence, but I am writing rather for your satisfaction than from any anxiety to clear my character. It will indeed be a great joy to me if, some day, when I am no longer able to be of service to souls by an active life, and consequently have no use for my good name, God grants me the grace, which I so often beg of Him, to be quite lost in everyone's opinion, and to be treated as I deserve—that is, as a great sinner. I shall never become holy, I shall never escape Purgatory, unless I be perfectly degraded in the eyes of men, and completely forsaken. Always pray that this grace may come to me in its own good time, so that I may utilize it for God's glory and my own salvation—perhaps even for the salvation of other poor sinners. What happiness, if at this price I become detached from self-love, and able to cry out with David, ' What is there for me in heaven, or what do I seek on earth except God alone ? ' One day, I trust, you will know that I am speaking truth ; for deep down in my heart I have long been convinced that my prayer will be heard."



“ I have spoken to you in all frankness, as you have done to me, and as I hope you will always do. It can only raise you in my esteem.”

The entire month of June was passed at Amiens in prudent deliberation and earnest prayer. But once her reason was convinced that “ the step towards God ” was really in the direction of Namur, Laura started northwards, on the Feast of Our Lady’s Visitation, accompanied by Madame Dréville and, of course, the faithful Kitty.

She met with a cordial reception at the Mother-House in the Rue des Fossés, where a couple of rooms on the ground-floor were thoughtfully arranged for her use, as she still limped slightly in consequence of a recent sprain.

Madame Dréville returned to Amiens somewhat easier in her mind, after she had spoken with several Sisters and visited the church, the garden, and the schools. After her departure, Laura set herself seriously to study the life of the Sisters, with a view to find out if she was capable of following the Rule to the letter.

## CHAPTER XIV

### VISIT TO NAMUR

“ There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are we now afloat.”

SHAKESPEARE.

IT was in 1807 that Blessed Julie Billiart, having finally withdrawn from the Amiens Diocese, established the Mother-House of her Institute in the episcopal city of Namur. Here she died in 1816, and here, for the next twenty-two years, her work was continued with admirable energy and success by Mère St. Joseph Blin de Bourdon—a woman of rare talent and virtue, who deserves at least a passing notice in these pages, for her influence was still in full vigour when Mrs. Petre presented herself as a postulant at Namur.

Françoise Blin de Bourdon had paid the penalty of rank and piety during the horrors of the French Revolution, and just escaped the guillotine by the opportune fall of Robespierre. The rest of her life was associated with Blessed Julie in establishing a Congregation devoted entirely to one of the most pressing needs of the day—the education and religious instruction of girls. While Julie travelled from place to place, founding convents, interviewing authorities, and giving at first impetus, and later encouragement, to schools

and teachers, Mère St. Joseph remained at Namur, quietly organizing the system of education to be adopted in our schools, and superintending the intellectual development of the young Sisters. She was eminently qualified for the task, having herself received a superior education in the days of the old régime ; while in riper years, at the Court of Marie Antoinette, she had learnt the value of an early grounding in practical piety, for a young girl entering Society, yet wishful to keep herself “ unspotted from the world.”

And if the young mistresses found in her a perfect model of refinement and simple dignity for their own guidance in the upbringing of their pupils, they also revered her deeply religious spirit, her deference in all things to the wishes of her Superior. Blessed Julie, for instance, had a habit of interrupting the studies ; in her fear, say the Annals, lest Mère St. Joseph’s eagerness for the intellectual advancement of the Sisters should interfere with their religious training. So, in the midst of an absorbing lesson, teacher and class were often summoned to join in some household work. On such occasions Mère St. Joseph’s prompt alacrity made easier to those under her the acquisition of that supple obedience which distinguishes the Institute at the present day, that versatility which enables the Sister of Notre Dame to change her occupation at the call of duty, without a regretful glance backward at the task left unfinished, or to be finished by another.

“ Remember,” Blessed Julie often repeated to her daughters—“ remember that you are the foundation-stones of our Institute. Future generations will look to you, as to models of the religious virtues which ought to characterize the Sisters of Notre Dame.”

From 1816 to 1838, the growing Institute looked to Mère St. Joseph as its Superior-General ; and under her

care were trained a number of talented and virtuous religious, who became, as it were, the second layer of stones in the rising edifice. Mrs. Petre was already acquainted with one of these, in the person of Sister Clarie. During this visit to Namur, she was to be edified by several others, among whom none made a deeper impression than the Reverend Mother Constantine, fifth Superior-General of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Even as a novice, Sister Constantine had been singled out by an experienced Jesuit, as a chosen soul whose intellectual and spiritual gifts were worthy of special cultivation. A statesmanlike grasp of the principles of government, a lovable cheerfulness and power of sympathy, attuned to her the hearts of her Sisters. The secret of her holiness was her favourite saying, culled from the Gospel, "I do at each hour the things that are pleasing to My Father."\* Thus, her strong will, subdued by self-conquest to the yoke of obedience, was turned with all the earnestness of a noble nature to the task of the moment. And when her duties left her leisure, she was usually to be found absorbed in prayer before the Tabernacle. The chaplain at Namur kept his own counsel as to the spiritual favours with which Jesus in the Eucharist rewarded her loving assiduity in His presence; but more than one stranger priest remarked on the supernatural radiance emanating from her countenance at the moment of Holy Communion.

Poor Sister Clarie, in heretical England, dared not approach the Holy Table oftener than the other Sisters, for fear of giving scandal; but it was a joy to her, in the midst of this privation, to know that her beloved Mother-General could satisfy her sacramental hunger six days out of seven.



REV. MOTHER CONSTANTINE  
Fifth Superior-General of the Sisters of Notre Dame





Simplicity was Mère Constantine's characteristic virtue, say the Sisters who have known her intimately. All she said and did was with the sole view of pleasing God and furthering His Honour by her service. "I cannot think of our dear Mother except as in heaven," said her successor after her death, "because she always took such pains about her own sanctification."

Mère Constantine did not attach much importance to Laura's visit in 1850. Some days previously she told Sister Marie Thérésia, the mistress of postulants :

"Mrs. Petre is coming here to see if our life will suit her. Answer all her questions, and show her everything. But I dare say she will not stay."

"She will certainly not stay," replied Sister Marie Thérésia very demurely, "if she sees the dreadful condition of the tables in the postulants' refectory. May they not have a coat of paint before she comes?"

"Decidedly not," was the emphatic reply. "I wish her to see things exactly as they are."

But Laura had no fault to find with the tables, or anything else in the Sisters' premises.

"How poor, but how exquisitely clean!" she repeated, as she passed from room to room. She was particularly pleased with the sleeping arrangements.

"They had given me so many pillows," she afterwards confided to Sister Clarie, "that, until I saw the Sisters' bedrooms, I was really afraid it was in the Rule that we might never lie down."

"It is easy to be orderly when there are no superfluities," she remarked, when she had finished her tour of inspection.

They were standing in one of the parlours allotted to her use, and Sister Marie Thérésia glanced around significantly. "Not so easy, unless everyone makes it a point to leave nothing out of place."

“ Oh, I can be tidy !” protested Laura ; “ I have been well trained as a child. But Catherine, my maid, likes to put my things away herself, and I have to be very careful of her feelings just at present.”

The elementary schools at the Mother-House (although not then on the palatial scale which makes them nowadays one of the handsomest blocks of buildings in the town) have always given visitors the correct impression that the poor are the cherished portion of Blessed Julie’s little flock. Laura knew enough about the Education Question, from the Bell and Lancaster schools of her childhood to the Blue Books of 1847, to contrast the visible results of the practical systematic training given in the Sisters’ classes with the haphazard experimental methods in vogue in the England of that period. Her London experience in St. Elizabeth’s Society and with Miss Prestwich made her rightly appreciate the “ Catholic atmosphere ” of the atelier where working girls just past school-age could begin the battle of life under the most favourable auspices and with every safeguard for faith and morals.

A discreet silence was maintained in presence of the boarders as to the sweet-faced, distinguished-looking lady in deep mourning who greeted them so pleasantly when she met one or another in the garden or near the Church.

“ Her manner was so affable and courteous,” writes one, “ that we liked to meet her and receive her smiling salute. Sometimes she paid us a little compliment ; she had a taste for music, and always, after a grand Benediction, told us how much she enjoyed our singing.”

There was an English girl, rather older than the others, “ short in stature, with red hair and red face, and of a very insinuating address.” She had come to Namur with bogus testimonials, ostensibly in search

of religion, but she never set foot in the church—being too unworthy, she alleged, with a humility which her companions at once pronounced hypocritical. The very sight of Mrs. Petre roused her to a sort of frenzy, and, in spite of herself, she spoke with bitterness and anger so that the elder girls remarked :

“ This lady must be a very great servant of God to provoke such wrath in that quarter.”

Possibly, however, the adventuress was really afraid lest Mrs. Petre should be in a position to unmask, as she eventually did, her career in other convents and under other aliases—including at least one “ Escaped Nun ” episode. Her anxiety on this score was by no means allayed, and the friendly curiosity among the pupils was increased, when they noticed—as school-girls will notice—how frequently the mysterious lady in black was to be seen in the company of the Reverend Mother.

Mère Constantine indeed devoted more time to her guest than she had originally intended. As Superior-General, it was her duty to keep in touch with each of her spiritual daughters : in Belgium, by visiting all the houses once a year ; in England and America, by writing to the individual Sisters. There were many points in our insular customs and politics which were puzzling to a Belgian, and which Laura’s long residence on the Continent enabled her to explain, more or less from a foreigner’s point of view. She was especially qualified to discuss the peculiar status of Catholics in England, and the educational problem then in process of solution.

Blackburn, the first of our Lancashire Convents, was opened on the 3rd of July, the day after her arrival at Namur. The Sisters’ letters to the Mother-General gave graphic details of the enthusiastic welcome they

received in the town. A jubilant crowd waited at the station to escort them to the Convent, where they found the house "clean as a new pin" from garret to basement, and the kitchen, moreover, well stocked with provisions and cooking utensils—each article a gift, and ticketed with the name of its donor.

There were two priests and six thousand Catholics in the town. Great ignorance prevailed—happily, however, combined with a thirst for intellectual improvement. Schools of all grades had to be established, and at once—Ragged Schools, where the children were clothed as well as taught; Night Schools (meeting four times a week, one hour after the steam-whistle had sounded "Cease work" in the adjacent factories); and the ordinary elementary schools, where the weekly fees ranged from a penny, for reading and needlework, to threepence, when the curriculum included writing and arithmetic, and where a select few offered as much as sixpence for an additional tincture of grammar and geography.

There was a hopeful ring about the Blackburn letters. Sisters of Notre Dame were also asked for in other Lancashire towns, where a fertile field was already white for the harvest. Our readers will remember we are writing of a period when the black years of Irish famine had recently increased the Catholic element in the North-West of England. From Mère Constantine's heart there mounted many a fervent thanksgiving to the good Master who had sent our Island in her hour of need such a willing worker as Mrs. Petre. This lady was, indeed, to prove a godsend to the children of many a future generation, and for the Congregation of Notre Dame one of the "dozen interior souls" so thirsted for by its Blessed Foundress—"souls who seek occasions for self-sacrifice, as the panting hart seeks



streams of running water, souls who give our good God a free hand *pour couper en plein drap*, and shape their spirituality according to His Sovereign Pleasure."

So it was that on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Laura is able to note in her diary :

"Reverend Mother came to my room, and told me she would give me a gown ! *Laus Deo semper !*"

It was judged expedient, however, that she should spend some weeks at Clapham Convent for the winding-up of her temporal affairs. Half her income she had earmarked for charitable purposes. Her almsgiving, as already stated, was very systematic ; and she found it more useful to the various good works in which she was interested, and more compatible, too, with her unobtrusive tastes, to spread her contributions over a series of years. As the bulk of her property was derived from sixteenth-century Kirkrapine, she looked upon it as entrusted to her for the benefit of the Church and of the poor in England ; and it was clearly understood from the first that Notre Dame's share in the sacred deposit was to be contingent on the development of the Order in the British Isles. For the present it was merely agreed that Laura should pay to the Mother-House at Namur forty pounds for each of her two years' probation. But in a private letter to Father de Buggenoms, telling him she had found her rest in a congenial Order, and attributing her happiness, under God, to his advice, she put her purse at his disposal, to help to enter the noviciate young girls showing signs of a good vocation for Notre Dame. "I hope," she concluded, "you will have a nice bouquet of postulants ready for me to offer Ma Mère on my return."

She wrote also to Miss Prestwich about some land she intended buying for Les Filles de Marie. Could she have chosen a more delicate way to make known

to the authorities at Namur that, even if she were unsuited to the life of a Sister of Notre Dame, she would not desist from helping the Order to accomplish in England the good work she saw so successfully carried out in Belgium ?

Mère Constantine took the new postulant to call on the Bishop of Namur, who, as ecclesiastical Superior of the Institute, was naturally interested in its progress overseas. On this occasion she noticed, as Laura assisted her to alight from the carriage, that her arm was encircled by a broad band of sharp-pointed links of steel. Since the early days of her widowhood, she had habitually made use of various instruments of penance.

They were also travelling companions to Liège, and when the Reverend Mother had finished her visitation of the two convents in the city, they knelt together in the Church of the Carmelites at Cornillon, on the very spot where St. Julienne received the Divine commission to spread devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Together, too, they climbed the holy mountain of Chèvremont, and prayed earnestly for the needs of England before the miraculous image of Our Lady, where many an English Jesuit in the penal days had asked a blessing on missionary labours and prospective martyrdom.

They visited also the convent at Verviers, and when Laura returned to Amiens at the end of July, Mère Constantine travelled with her as far as Braine-le-Comte, a town in Hainault, where at that period it seemed the rule for French trains to make a stoppage of some hours.

In her journey to Belgium Mrs. Petre had profited by this delay to call on the local Convent of Notre Dame, but had failed to gain admittance ; for the



portress happened to be in chapel with the rest of the community, and the door was opened by a Sister too deaf to understand a word she said. Since then the mysterious lady in black had been a standing joke among the Braine Sisters, and poor deaf Sister Reine was more than three parts persuaded she had turned from their door the Duchess d'Arenburg, come expressly to donate their chapel with a much-desired new altar !

After visiting the house at Braine, Mère Constantine went on to Antwerp, where, somewhat to her surprise, she again met her English postulant. Laura had found waiting for her at Amiens a letter from her eldest brother, who was with his sick wife at Ems for the sake of the waters, and implored her to come to them without needless delay. Of course she set out immediately, going round by Antwerp to obtain Mère Constantine's sanction to this change in her plans.

While in Germany, Mrs. Petre met Father Bernard Hafkenschied, a Redemptorist of no mean repute, and expressed to him in forcible terms her admiration for the Sisters of Notre Dame. So struck was he by her "valid and praiseworthy motives for joining this Congregation," that many years later he quoted her arguments to break down the Baron de Weichs's opposition to his eldest daughter's entry at Namur.

An amusing little adventure occurred when Laura at last set out for England. She was travelling on a fast-day, the Vigil of the Assumption, and Mère Constantine insisted that she should take her "one full meal" in the convent at Braine. During dinner the lowering masses of cloud announced a steady down-pour, and when it was time to set out for the station the first heavy drops had already begun to fall. There were no cabs in the primitive little town, nor could a

carriage be borrowed at a moment's notice. The Superior suggested putting off the journey, but Laura was anxious to reach Amiens, and considered umbrellas enough protection. However, on the road to the station the rain came down in torrents, the streets became streams, and they had to hold on to each other. A waterspout was passing over Belgium, inflicting serious damage on bridges and crops. There was nothing for it but to return to the convent for the night.

Laura's luggage was at the station, and a varied assortment of garments, clean and dry, but heterogeneous in colour and texture, were placed at the disposal of herself and Kitty. Nuns and maid were mortified at the inevitable masquerade, but Laura's laughter proved infectious. Her joy was complete when one of the large hooded cloaks which the Sisters wear in the streets was finally produced to cover all deficiencies.

"I am one of you now," she assured the Superior. "I shall write to Ma Mère that you have clothed me as a Sister of Notre Dame!"

"Oh, she will not scold!" was the good-humoured reply.

However, Laura was the innocent cause of a reprimand to the Braine Community on another count; for she sent them, a little later, twenty pounds towards their new altar, and Mère Constantine considered they had been lacking in discretion in allowing her to perceive their modest ambition in this respect.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CHEERFUL GIVER

“CHRIST : Who gives himself, with his alms feeds three,  
Himself, his hungering brother, and Me.”

LOWELL.

AN account of the next six weeks will be given, as far as possible, in Sister Clarie's own words.

“Mrs. Petre hurries her lawyers all she can, but their time is not always at her disposal, and her business progresses far more slowly than she likes, so eager is she to get back to Namur.”

She lodged in the convent, of course, but Kitty was installed in a house close by, in charge of the seventy packing-cases from Wilton Crescent. Here Laura spent many an hour considering which articles of her furniture would be most acceptable as presents for the different members of her large circle of friends and protégés.

“God is certainly pleased to see her activity and gaiety of heart in ridding herself of her belongings. Her delicate way of giving, and of giving pleasure withal, touches and edifies me very much. Just now she is sorting her books. Many she packs up for Namur, some she gives me—just the books we want, works of piety, useful knowledge, and healthy fiction for the boarding-school library.”

Clapham also came in for a goodly stock of household linen, kitchen plenishing, cedar-lined cupboards, and

other useful articles, including a plain, uncrested travelling set of plate, for Laura had noted the meagre supply of spoons and forks for use in the convent parlour.

"I have not had time to unpack, and have only a general idea of my riches," continues Sister Clarie. But, like a true Belgian, she gives forthwith a detailed inventory of the napery, characteristically adding: "We may share our treasures with Blackburn, may we not, Ma Mère?"

Meanwhile Laura missed no opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the spirit of the Institute, and her frank confidences increased the Superior's affectionate esteem.

"I think, as I have always thought, this lady will make an excellent religious. She receives many spiritual favours from God, and I am confident she will draw down great graces upon England. She has certainly brought a blessing on this house. . . . The more I see of her, the more I like her. She has the spirit of self-denial in a high degree, and is very particular about asking the most trifling permissions. . . . It is hard for an Englishwoman, more especially for one of her class, to begin religious life during a Belgian winter, and she bears discomforts so bravely that she will need watching lest they injure her health. I found out quite by accident that it is usually past midnight before she gets to sleep. Of course, I have insisted that she should take a little longer rest in the morning. . . . You need not fear that she will expect exceptional treatment in any way. She is of an active temperament, and has always led a busy and useful life. She is entering religion to work 'like the rest of the faithful.' The other day she said to a cousin of hers, who is a Sister of Charity: 'I may meet you some day in the street, if I am sent to take the children

to Mass.' She mentioned to me spontaneously that she dislikes the piano, but knows enough of music to teach the rudiments to beginners. She added : ' But I should need time to practise.' "

At first Sister Clarie did not encourage long conversations.

" There are many little things Mrs. Petre has yet to learn, and which I shall have to instil into her by degrees. This morning, for instance, she monopolized my attention for the best part of two hours, and seemed to regard it quite as a matter of course. I must tell her quietly that my time is precious. Fortunately, she is quick at taking hints, and will not give much trouble in the way of useless repetition."

But as the days lengthened into weeks, it was the Superior who sought the postulant to benefit by her opinion in dealings with the world outside. Henceforth there is a note of cheery optimism in the letters to Namur, and, after Laura's arrival there, an absence of interesting detail when submitting plans for Mère Constantine's approval. Instead, phrases like these abound : " Mrs. Petre [or Sister Mary of St. Francis] knows this person," or " will readily see what I mean," or " can explain the English custom on this point," etc.

A load of anxiety seems lifted from her mind. And yet she knows, and is happy in the knowledge, that the Cross in one guise or another will always be her " daily bread." We have so often quoted matter-of-fact passages from Sister Clarie's correspondence that we are glad to insert here one of the refreshing little Teresian bits which occasionally enliven the dulness of business details. The letter is undated, but its place in the series is evidently just after Laura's departure.

" I am just out of Retreat. The three days—all I could spare—passed only too quickly. The day will



dawn when we shall never have to come forth from the sweet occupation of loving God without distraction. I did not enjoy much sensible consolation. The leading idea throughout was that here below we must always expect to suffer. How should we manage without the certainty that it is the wood of the Cross alone which feeds and keeps alive in our souls the fire of Divine Love? I have tried to dwell on this consideration; for if the pain and trials which we have endured ever since we came to England (from the malice of the devil or the dearth of pupils) seem to have vanished, now that we have reason to hope things are shaping differently, other crosses are sure to take their place. Suffering, in one form or another, is always waiting at the door. Happily, God is there as well, and He alone suffices."

Thoughts of this lofty nature were needed to strengthen Laura in her farewell visit to the dear old home of her childhood. Usually her coming to Costessey was heralded by elaborate preparations at the Hall and in the village. But this time there was no pretence at rejoicing. Sad faces and tears greeted her at every turn, and her own heart was very full. True, her conscience could acquit her of having ever "loved the world too well" at any phase of her joyous existence, but none the less was she realizing the truth and pathos of Father Faber's verses:

"O Earth, thou art too beautiful!

And thou, dear Home, thou art too sweet. . . .

And yet I can rejoice there are

So many things on earth to love,

So many idols for the fire,

My love and loyal change to prove.

He that loves most has most to lose,

And willing loss is Love's best prize;

The more that Yesterday hath loved,

The more To-day must sacrifice."





COSTESSEY HALL



“ The journey to Costessey has been a hard wrench ” (we are again quoting Sister Clarie), “ but, thank God, the worst of the partings are now over. She has said good-bye to her old father.”

On her return to London there were still many visits to pay and receive, and farewell letters to write to friends at a distance. The following is to her cousin, Mrs. de Lisle, at Grâce-Dieu :

“ CONVENT OF NOTRE DAME,

“ CLAPHAM,

“ *August 29th, 1850.*

“ MY DEAREST LAURA,

“ I feel so ashamed of myself for not having answered your and your husband’s letters that I hardly know how to begin. You must both excuse me, in consequence of all that has been going on in my mind subsequent to leaving one religious institution for another. I have often thought of you both, and of the very agreeable days I passed with you, and which now, I fear, will never be repeated. I could not find at St. Anne’s what I sought for, but I hope and trust that at last I have found a resting-place on this earth.

“ The Order of Notre Dame is instituted for the education and instruction of children and young women of all classes, but especially the destitute poor. I think that more good may be done among them than anywhere else. It is a beautiful Order in other respects, and does an immense amount of good in Belgium. My dear father has given me his consent, and I hope to enter at Namur in the course of next month. I cannot express to you how happy I feel, though I go through much that is painful to nature in leaving my father and my family.

“ Pray thank Mr. Phillipps for his kind letters

which edified me very much. I hope that you and he will pray for me, and I will for you.

“ At Liège I saw the manner in which St. Juliana is represented. I hope you will have her in the window of the Blessed Sacrament. Is this commenced ? I trust so. Mr. Pugin told me that it could not be done this year, which caused me not to write to you about it as soon as I otherwise should have done. But I hope there will be no delay ; and tell me, my dear Laura, without ceremony, what it ought to cost, for I am stupid about these things, and really do not know.

“ We are under some anxiety about Mrs. Stafford-Jerningham’s health. It is a serious case of asthma, and she appears to recede, instead of improving.

“ Good-bye, my dearest Laura. With affectionate remembrances to Mr. Phillipps,

“ Your affectionate cousin,

“ L. PETRE.

“ Let me soon hear from you, how you and all your children are getting on.”

Laura could not refuse—indeed, she had no wish to refuse—her father’s request that she should spend another fortnight at Ems, till Mrs. Stafford-Jerningham was suited with a capable maid. Her sister-in-law’s distress constituted another urgent plea for hastening on proceedings. By the middle of October most of her charitable undertakings were established on a permanent footing, her domestics pensioned, recommended to suitable situations, or otherwise provided for, and a comfortable house selected and furnished, under her personal supervision, for the heart-broken Catherine Doggett. She had also to enlist the good offices of lady friends in behalf of those

orphaned children, educated at her expense, who would otherwise miss the sympathetic interest, affectionate counsels, and words of timely warning or encouragement, which add so delicate a bloom to the ripened fruits of benevolent beneficence.

There was one of her pious undertakings which was to remain for a series of years the object of her personal solicitude, for she looked upon it as a sacred bequest. Mr. Petre, even in his most thoughtless days, had always at heart the spiritual interests of his tenantry, and Laura deemed she could erect no more fitting monument to his memory than by superseding the chapel he had built at Selby by a Gothic church, with presbytery and schools attached. Already, in the first month of her widowhood, architects had called upon her with plans and estimates ; but it was not till 1857 that she could hand over the completed structure to the Bishop of the diocese. A thick bundle of letters, found among her papers and docketed " Selby," shows with what minute attention she followed every stage of proceedings through the intervening years. So amply did she endow the mission that the priest-in-charge was able to spend or bequeath over a thousand pounds towards the erection of a convent and the upkeep of school and church. After his death, the following letter was received at Namur from Canon Fisher, Vicar-General of the Diocese of Leeds :

" HEDON HALL,

" *December 13th, 1871.*

" DEAR MRS. PETRE,

" Mr. Gordon and myself, the executors of our departed friend, the late Mr. Rigby of Selby, feel that it is only an act of courtesy to write to you on this occasion.

“We knew, in general, how great a friend and benefactress you had been to the mission at Selby. The church, the schools, and the presbytery speak for themselves. It was only on making the investigation for diocesan purposes, and on Mr. Rigby’s behalf, that we fully understood how munificently every provision had been made for the service of the church, the incumbent, and the schools. Certainly everything has been provided munificently. The clergy are deeply impressed and duly grateful.”



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE TWO YEARS' PROBATION

"Pitch thy behaviour low, thy projects high,  
So shalt thou humble and magnanimous be."

G. HERBERT.

LAURA PETRE—Sister Mary of St. Francis we are henceforth to call her—reached Namur towards the end of October, 1850. Before many days had elapsed we find her with a white veil, and clothed in the habit of Notre Dame.

As a novice she came under the immediate influence of one with whom she was to enjoy exceptionally intimate relations during the remainder of her life, one whom she venerated with an affectionate esteem, never to be weakened by familiar intercourse, till that summer's day, thirty-six years later, when she whispered :

"Ma Mère, give me leave to die !"

Sister Aloysie had spent the first years of her religious training under Blessed Julie's trusted friend and successor, Mère St. Joseph, and there was much in the calm dignity of her demeanour, and her delicate insight into character, which recalled that eminent servant of God. She was active and alert in all her movements, yet never flurried or excited, and her every gesture might serve as a model of religious decorum. Her somewhat homely features were usually lit up—nay,

beautified—by a pleasant smile, but seldom was she heard to laugh, though able to relish a joke, and make one, too, with a quiet humour all her own.

In 1850 Sister Aloysie was novice-mistress, a “consoling charge” on which she looked back wistfully in the more strenuous years when she was local Superior of the Mother-House, or Superior-General of the entire Congregation. She loved her office, and was thoroughly devoted to its duties. Twice a day she assembled her little flock to discourse to them familiarly on the privileges and responsibilities of the religious state, and to explain the obligations and aids to holiness contained in the several chapters of their holy Rule. Her theme suggested very lofty ideas, which she was careful to express in the simplest language, so that the least cultured among her audience could not fail to understand every word. The better to drive home her meaning, she made use of homely metaphor and illuminative anecdote—if need be, of personal reminiscence, not always redounding to her credit. The following story was intended to throw light on the detachment which is such an essential fruit of the virtue of holy poverty :

“Soon after my profession, we had one day to exchange our little manuals [books of rules and prayers in daily use among the Sisters of Notre Dame]. We piled them on the table in front of dear Mère St. Joseph, and then she gave to each of us the one that came nearest her hand. The book I received had been used by one of the cooks—a very holy soul, who liked to have some devout thought before her eyes while she was busy about her work. I was so disgusted by the grease marks on her favourite pages that I left it airing on a window-sill for some days. Then I told our dear Mère St. Joseph of my want of mortifi-

cation, and she gave me a famous penance, which I have never forgotten. I had to do without a manual for some time, but at last she gave me another, and it was one in very good condition."

No such test of detachment seems to have been imposed in the noviciate under Mère Aloysie's gentle sway. The novices loved her as a safe friend and trusted adviser. This was her first injunction to newcomers :

" Pray well, eat well, laugh well, and sleep well. The rest will come by degrees."

Without prayer, in effect, perseverance in virtue becomes impossible ; a stinting in food is one of Satan's devices to hinder a member of an " active " religious Order from using brain and muscle to the *greater* glory of God ; persons inclined to melancholy are by Rule debarred admittance among Blessed Julie's joyous little band ; and a night of dreamless slumber is in youth the reward and prelude of a healthy hard-working day.

During the two years' probation each novice had free access to her mistress for sympathy, encouragement, and discreet counsel in her troubles, difficulties, or transports of fervour. She was quick to notice the slightest imperfection in conduct, but usually forbore to mention it directly, till the novice found it out for herself.

" We must not move faster than the Holy Ghost," was an axiom often on her lips.

Thus it was some time before Sister Mary of St. Francis realized that she was contravening the custom of the noviciate by continuing to wear her watch after she had been clothed with the religious habit. In many communities—those, for instance, which have to do with the sick—a watch is an indispensable

article of each Sister's trousseau. But in Notre Dame there are few charges necessitating its use, and even in this twentieth century it is tabooed as a luxury by the greater number of the Sisters.

Mère Aloysie would have waited long before requiring the sacrifice of the little trinket, had not the mistress of postulants volunteered an unmistakable hint.

"What ! a novice with a watch ! I never heard of such a thing !" exclaimed Sister Marie Thérésia, on seeing Sister Mary of St. Francis looking at the time.

Unhesitatingly the watch was unhooked and placed in her hand. "Why did you not tell me before ? I did not know I could not keep it. But, oh ! however shall I manage to be in time for the different community exercises ?"

"The others contrive to be in time," was the matter-of-fact reply. "There are plenty of clocks about, and, like myself, you will soon get accustomed to listen for the bells."

In the world Laura Petre had been heard to complain that every little sacrifice she made to please God was sure to be found out by her friends, and commented upon in a fashion so flattering as to fill her with confusion. No such inconvenience awaited her on the threshold of religious life. Here heroic efforts were the order of the day ; and she had, moreover, for associates young girls, all earnest in the pursuit of holiness, and each, by reason of that very youth and earnestness, more or less tempted to gauge the dear neighbour's progress by the standard she had set herself in whatever individual virtue was, for the time being, the target of her particular examen. This remark adds weight to the testimony of one of the number, Sister Marie Ludovica, a mere child of six-

teen, who had passed on the prize-day in the preceding August direct from the boarding-school at Namur to the postulants' quarters. She spent the whole of her religious life at the Mother-House, twenty-five years the comrade, and ten the subordinate, of Sister Mary of St. Francis ; and she has left the record of her impressions, from which we select the following passage :

“ From the first, Sister Mary of St. Francis submitted with fervour to the requirements of the Rule and the many little hardships incidental to community life. We were all greatly edified by the simple, matter-of-fact way in which she took her place among us, as if she were the youngest in years as well as in religion. Some of us thought at first that her presence would cause constraint, and that we should be ill at ease in her company. Our fears were soon dispelled ; never were our recreations more joyous or more animated, and she was foremost in promoting the general merriment. It required adroit questioning to elicit from her anything about her past experiences, and then it was merely a passing word, incidental to some topic of general interest. Thus I learnt something of her pilgrimage as a girl to St. Winifred's Well and of her audiences with our Holy Father Pius IX. I also knew she had been a daily communicant in the world—the practice was of rare occurrence in those days—for I had been a pupil at Namur in the previous summer, and was much edified by her fervour at the altar-rails, and by her profound respect in presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

“ During our two years in the noviciate I had plenty of opportunities to observe her closely, yet I cannot instance a shade of imperfection in the bearing and behaviour of this true religious. On the contrary, I admired her piety, humility, respect for Superiors,



love of religious observances, simplicity, and perfect charity. All her fellow-novices, without exception, loved and respected her most sincerely."

This love and respect amounted to reverence on the part of the English novices, who were more fully acquainted with her antecedents, and better able to gauge her difficulties by comparing them with their own. Several of them became Superiors later on, and were fond of relating to their respective communities how eagerly Sister Mary of St. Francis devoted her intervals of leisure to manual labour, and how often she entreated to be allowed to take her turn in the most menial household duties. In the words of Mère Constantine, "she forgot her age, her rank, her accomplishments, in order more closely to imitate Jesus Christ, our Divine Master and Model."

In those days (and I trust things have not altered since for the worst) every Belgian girl prided herself on a practical acquaintance with the details of domestic economy. The English-speaking novices, as a class, were good-humouredly looked down upon in this respect. Sister Mary of St. Francis fared better than sundry of her compatriots, for, as a working member of St. Elizabeth's Society, she at least knew how to make a bed, to sweep a room, and to light a fire. But she had yet to learn the ethics of potato-peeling; and a lesson was soon volunteered by a new-comer, a simple country-girl, perhaps not half her age.

"Is it possible that your mother never taught you the proper way to handle a potato? You slice off the peel in little chips, instead of turning the potato round and round in your hand, as I do, and taking it off in one piece. And you spend over one the time in which I dispose of six."

Every novice of Notre Dame must show aptitude



for some department of work in conformity with the aims of the Congregation. Thus, in the case of Sister Mary of St. Francis, household duties, such as sweeping floors, washing dishes, and preparing vegetables for the kitchen, served merely as recreative interludes to the intellectual labours of the day. For Mère Constantine had quickly decided in which direction her talents could be of most use, and she had to begin at once to study the necessities of the Institute in England. English vocations for Notre Dame were on the increase, and novices and postulants had to be trained for their future work in the schools. These young people taught one another, with Sister Mary of St. Francis as organizer and referee. She also gave lessons in English to the chaplain, Canon Carpiaux, and to the Belgian Sisters who had volunteered for active service in England and America.

Her business capacity was also in requisition for the houses existing, or shortly to be founded, in her native land; and the amount of correspondence this entailed gave her from the first the privilege of a room to herself, and the more valued privilege of daily intercourse with the saintly Mother-General. The privacy of a cell, it may be remembered, was one of the sacrifices which Laura Petre had braced herself to forego. On other points, as on this, the reality proved brighter than the prospect: the nettle in her spirited grasp remained "soft as silk."

"I have tried both states of life," she said, with grateful emphasis, at a much later period, "and I know in which I have found the truest happiness. I am speaking of happiness here as well as hereafter."

In effect, life in the cloister may have been for her in certain respects a break with former habits; in another sense it was but a continuation, under easier

conditions, of the life of Christian perfection in which she had already made considerable progress. Let us listen to her own practice, as embodied in the advice which she gave to others when treating of the dignity of religious obedience.

“The commands issued by human authority have almost invariably something in them which renders submission difficult. Men make slaves when they enforce submission : God makes kings of those who serve Him. ‘To serve God is to reign,’ says the Psalmist. If you wish to make obedience easy, admit no other light than the light of faith. . . .

“When nature revolts against a command, pray, but never cavil. If you cavil, the victory remains with the enemy. The devil can gain no hold upon a soul who has constant resort to prayer ; he can easily influence one who cavils. Satan is the cleverest sophist the world ever saw ; he knows quite well how to put things in a light which suits his purpose.”

Such prudent directors as the Abbé de Brandt and the sons of St. Alphonsus had forestalled the mistress of novices in their instructions how best to wield against this wily arch-enemy of her soul the effective weapon of rigorous self-examination. The time set apart for prayer was, it is true, now restricted to three hours a day ; but everything around her, from the close vicinity of the Blessed Sacrament to the crucifix at her side, combined to keep the thought of God never long absent from her mind, and each iota of regular observance tended to make the livelong day an unbroken succession of what Sister Clarie was wont to call “the prayer of do.” We may judge of Sister Mary of St. Francis’s mental attitude in this respect from her advice to novices later on.

“What have we to live for but for Him, doing all

we can for Him, by Him, in Him ; drawing Him into our hearts as the very air we breathe, and then pouring forth loving ejaculations and aspirations ? This exercise, my dear Sisters, does not take you from your work. You should stand before Him as a loving child in the presence of her father, conscious of His presence, though not actually occupied with Him. A picture, the sight of a crucifix, the habit you wear, the instructions you receive, should raise your heart, and keep you united to him. Thus, from morning till evening, you need never forget Him, but teach, work, do all that you have to do, under His immediate superintendence. How glad I should be if you only made this your habit ! What a happy life you would then lead ! You might even become saints. Try to acquire it now ; and if it is somewhat irksome and troublesome at first, you will be amply repaid by the happiness it will bring you all your life long."

As for the occupations thus sanctified, she had long been accustomed to make the extension of Christ's kingdom in the hearts of her fellow-creatures the main duty of her business hours. Her labours in religion were all the more fruitful for being concentrated in one particular channel, all the more congenial to her common-sense humility, inasmuch as she was safeguarded by detailed dependence on the will of another.

Mrs. Petre's entrance into religion, coinciding, as it did, with the acute outburst of anti-Catholic feeling aroused by Lord John Russell's historic *Durham Letter*, drew from Cardinal Wiseman some lines of congratulation on her choice of the religious state " in a form likely to be so beneficial to England."

" I do not know," His Eminence goes on to say, " whether from your calm retreat you are able to watch the progress of religion here, in spite of perse-

cution, obloquy, and hatred. God has much more than compensated us for all this contradiction by splendid conversions and the steady advance of the Faith in every rank of life. Still, we are left with much to desire for our own poor. The great efforts of Protestantism are now directed to pervert them by Ragged Schools and others, and we have no means adequate to meet these attempts. The greatest work possible of charity is to provide education for the very poorest classes—and with regard to poor girls Religious Institutions can alone do the work effectually. God grant that you may be able to co-operate in this holy work !

“ You will probably have heard of the coarse and brutal attack lately made, in Parliament and out of it, on Religious Houses. The *Times* even went so far as to allude to *you* being driven into a convent. I would not mention this were it not for the temper of Society at this moment, which renders great caution necessary when speaking about property applied in any way to Catholic purposes. Whatever, therefore, you may have to do should be managed under the best and soundest advice, and with every possible precaution.”

A brief sketch of the progress of Notre Dame in England up to the time of her profession will serve as evidence how thoroughly Sister Mary of St. Francis entered into the Cardinal's views ; for it must be borne in mind that, although in each particular instance the final decision rested with the Superior-General, yet even as a novice her word had weight with Mère Constantine, and whatever was done in the English province was in a very true sense her personal work.

The first measure of importance which claimed her





CLAPHAM CONVENT BOATHOUSE AND LAKE





attention was the purchase of the present convent on Clapham Common. Sister Clarie had long been anxious to buy the house she was renting in Bedford Row, so as to make sadly needed alterations. But the landlord refused to sell, and Mrs. Petre, who when a postulant carefully examined the house, considered it too slightly constructed to be convenient as a permanent abode. Shortly after her arrival at Namur a suitable estate came into the market—a roomy mansion facing Clapham Common, with thirteen acres of ground in the rear—and her lawyers had little difficulty in securing it for the Sisters at a reasonable price.

Our first convent in Liverpool began at No. 3, Islington Flags, on Friday, the 28th of March. Sister Marie Alphonse de Liguori and her three companions came earlier than they were expected, and found things in a turmoil—men fixing bedsteads, women scrubbing floors, and priests in the kitchen, frying soles, boiling potatoes, and baking a rice-pudding. Thus did Mgr. Carr and Mgr. Nugent give to our Sisters the first proofs of the fatherly kindness which was to show itself on countless occasions through a long series of years.

A few months later negotiations were set on foot to transfer to Notre Dame the management of the Girls' Orphanage in Falkner Street. Namur accepted the conditions, and on the 4th of October Sister Marie Alphonse de Liguori was installed at the head of the new establishment.

Sister Aimée de Jesus, our seventh Superior-General, replaced her at Islington Flags. Here the work of the Sisters had been so visibly blessed by Almighty God that already more space was needed to accommodate the numerous pupils. Before the end of the year the community moved into a larger

house on Mount Pleasant, with a good garden and room to build. "The purchase of these premises was looked upon at the time as a somewhat rash outlay for a few foreign nuns, with as yet no prestige to recommend them to the public. Sister Aimée, however, knew well what she was about, and this opportune acquisition, made by one who always had *la main heureuse* in her undertakings, was really the beginning of all the educational works of which Mount Pleasant has been the centre ever since" (*English Foundations of the Sisters of Notre Dame*).

Before the removal from Islington, however, another colony of Notre Dame had migrated to Lancashire, settling this time in the very heart of the cotton industry. Manchester had been the goal of Sister Clarie's prayerful ambition, even before her momentous interview with Mrs. Petre in the spring of 1850, and great was her joy in assisting the new foundation to become an accomplished fact. The beginnings were very like Blackburn—the same grades of schools, the same ignorance and eagerness to learn among the pupils, the same exuberance of hospitality on the part of the parents. Let us hear some grateful reminiscences from its first Superior, Sister Jeanne de Chantal.

"The mother of one of our poor children brought us every Saturday a large piece of pork and a loaf. A refusal of this very substantial offering would have hurt the feelings of this excellent woman, who probably had to stint herself to make it. An Italian, who judged our tastes by his own, kept us well supplied with macaroni. Almost every day, one or another of the children in the elementary schools brought us packets of tea or other little provisions of the kind. We received so many oranges the first winter that we

had them as dessert, even on weekdays. For our first Christmas dinner each of three families sent us a goose, all ready stuffed for cooking, in real English fashion. Our community was small, and the unfortunate birds appeared on the table so many times that we were quite tired of them at last, though we never omitted to pray for the worthy people who had sent them with such kindness."

Notwithstanding the many tokens they received of the fatherly care of Divine Providence, Almighty God did not altogether deprive the Manchester community of the happiness of practising holy poverty. They had at first neither altar nor ciborium, nor other things requisite to receive and retain Our Lord in the chapel. At last a kind Catholic gentleman lent them an altar, and Father Croskell consented to leave in their charge the pyx which he used to carry the Blessed Sacrament to the sick.

"After this," continues Sister Jeanne, "the house wore another aspect. It was no longer empty as before. We had now a centre, a rendezvous, where heart met heart in loving union with the Divine Heart throbbing in the Sacred Host. Yet we were often deprived of our treasure for hours at a time, when one or other of the priests came to fetch the Blessed Sacrament for the sick."

A middle-grade school, too, became a necessity long before suitable premises could be provided. And so, our narrator goes on, "The chinks in the roof afforded the mistresses facilities for teaching astronomy, or, better still, for lifting the heart to God by the contemplation of the heavens. Everything else was in keeping; everything spoke of that holy poverty which our Rule enjoins us to cherish as a mother."

When Mère Constantine came to England in the

summer of 1852, she authorized the Manchester Sisters to hold a bazaar to obtain funds for a new building, and contributed generously to the plenishing of the stalls. Sister Mary of St. Francis, who had not yet made her vows, presented the community with a ciborium and a chalice.

Readers of the Life of Blessed Julie Billiart will remember how much importance is attached in the Congregation of Notre Dame to the visitation of the houses by the Superior-General or her delegates. "If anything is wrong, it can be set right; if everything is right, it is a comfort to know it." In this particular visitation, while the Reverend Mother inquired carefully into the individual requirements of each one of her spiritual daughters, the novice (in a black veil for the nonce) concentrated her attention on defects in accommodation and in school equipment.

Everywhere there was a pressing demand for additional Sisters, immediate work for at least a dozen experienced harvesters in the English fields of Notre Dame; and Sister Mary of St. Francis kept steadily before Mère Constantine a proposal made to her that Whitsuntide. We can imagine the arch smile of the novice as she whispered demurely in every fresh emergency:

"Ma Mère, the Infant Jesus wants to come to His Mother."

She had learnt the phrase from her old friend, Father de Buggenoms, who had been for nearly a year in active correspondence with the heads of a very fervent community established since 1845 in the town of Northampton. These "Sisters of the Infant Jesus" were all "as pliable as porridge" in the hands of their Reverend Mother, and worked in perfect

harmony with the local clergy for the good of souls. God had blessed their zealous endeavours to such an extent that, besides their labours in the schools, they had prepared for Baptism over four hundred converts, brought back to their duties a goodly proportion of careless Catholics, and instructed the soldiers' wives in the garrison to relish the salutary exercise of mental prayer.

Meanwhile local exigencies made necessary some modifications in their rules, and the Reverend Mother realized that the task was beyond her capacity. Father de Buggenoms, to whom she applied for advice, took the kindest interest in the matter, and encouraged her by prayers and lengthy epistles, "enough to fill a volume." In one of these the following passage gave the Reverend Mother and her assistant much food for thought and earnest prayer to the Holy Ghost.

"I have always been struck, when reading the Rules of the Sisters of Notre Dame, by the clear, concise way in which they are drawn up, without gap in their logical sequence, and so comprehensive that no point of importance is missed. I know no other religious Order for women more capable of rendering service to the Church, better adapted to the actual needs of Society, or affording so effectual a safeguard to vocations. In compiling their Rules, two eminent servants of God—Mère Julie Billiard and her worthy companion, Mère St. Joseph—have faithfully followed the irresistible impulse of the Holy Ghost."

A deliberate and prayerful scrutiny of these Rules led to the conclusion that it would be well to adopt them in their entirety. The very first words of the opening chapter, "The Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame is governed by a Superior-General,"



appealed strongly to the Reverend Mother, who felt keenly the isolated position of her own community and her personal need of a firm and enlightened direction in matters pertaining to its government.

By her express desire, Father de Buggenoms laid the whole affair before Mère Constantine, representing at the same time his own earnest wish that she would not refuse the request of these fervent religious to be admitted among the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Mère Constantine was not at first inclined to affiliate a whole community of nuns, some of them in delicate health. But Sister Mary of St. Francis pleaded strongly in their behalf, and her opinion so far prevailed that the matter remained in abeyance till the Reverend Mother could take the advice of her Council on her return to Namur.

After mature deliberation and satisfactory answers to minute inquiries, letters of affiliation were at length issued to the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, with the cordial concurrence and formal sanction of the Bishops of Namur and of Northampton. And thus, thanks in some measure to the gentle pertinacity of Sister Mary of St. Francis, our Institute gained a convent on a good working footing, and fourteen excellent religious, of whom six proved capable Superiors. Thirteen of the number were alive to celebrate their silver jubilee as Sisters of Notre Dame. In October, 1877, these received the following affectionate congratulations from the pen of Sister Mary of St. Francis :

“ Your charming address has given Ma Mère and me much pleasure. We shall keep and value it as the embodiment of good and happy feelings. We have all had reason to rejoice in the event of 1852, which gave us so many good and dear Sisters, and enlarged our opportunities of doing good.”



There was another event of 1852 ever to be held in grateful remembrance by the Sisters of Notre Dame. On the 14th of September, Sister Mary of St. Francis was one of the happy group of twenty-seven who, in presence of Monseigneur de Hessel, Bishop of Namur, pronounced the four vows of "Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, and, in accordance with Obedience, a special care for the instruction of young girls." The ritual of her religious profession was very simple, in striking contrast to the pomp of circumstance on the summer's morning, twenty-three years before, when the timid girl of nineteen sought the nuptial blessing provided by the Church on the unknown vicissitudes of married life.

She was now, in the prime of life and the full development of her ripened faculties, to enter a new phase of her career, for whose duties and responsibilities the last two years had been a sedulous preparation. She had weighed in detail the responsibilities she was about to assume, and she had heard, from the lips of the Mother-General and in the daily instructions of the Mistress of Novices, a careful explanation of every article of the Rule she was to observe till death with such loving fidelity. Moreover, the task had been assigned to her of rendering the text of this Rule into English, and the accuracy of the translation may vouch for her careful study to penetrate the meaning of its every phrase.

"On ne fait pas longtemps ce qu'on n'aime pas à faire." Sister Mary of St. Francis persevered in the observance of this Rule for thirty-six years. She was fond of quoting a remark once made to her by an eminent Jesuit :

"Yours is an Institute so thoroughly adapted to its end that time and its changes need make no impression

upon it, and, provided that its members adhere firmly to the letter and the spirit of the Rule, there is nothing to prevent its lasting as long as the Church."

Sister Mary of St. Francis was not much given to record her emotions in writing. But we can form some idea of the calm happiness impregnating her soul on the great day of her vows by her words to some novices whom she was helping to prepare for their religious profession in April, 1870.

"My dear Sisters, what a happiness you are going to have ! It is a happiness that cannot be explained, such a sensible feeling of joy and fervour and generosity. You may have felt something like it on the day of your First Communion. It is also a feeling of safety. During our noviciate we still seem to be floating on a stormy and dangerous sea, ever fearful of meeting with shoals and rocks which might prove fatal to our weak little barks. But these fears are now at an end ; we may say that we have landed on the sweet and tranquil shore of religion. This feeling always remains with us, though from time to time Our Lord seems to withdraw it for awhile, so as to make us merit more.

"On this day Our Lord restores to you your baptismal robe of innocence. Oh, keep it without the slightest stain until the day of your death, when you can present it in all its beauty to the dear Spouse of your souls ! No doubt it will become a little dusty now and then, through the constant contact with creatures. But we must never tire of dusting it. This we can do in several ways ; above all, by a good, fervent weekly confession, by our daily examens and other spiritual exercises, and by a thousand little acts of devotion, such as taking holy water with contrition. You know trains stop very often at stations

to take in coal and water. Well, we may look upon ourselves as trains travelling towards perfection, and our spiritual exercises are as stations where we take in an extra supply of graces to help us on our road.

“A very holy priest once said to me when I was in the world: ‘Give to the poor in abundance! Be always giving, for charity is the greatest of all virtues, and covers a multitude of sins and imperfections.’ I now say the same to each one of you. But you will ask me how you are to manage. You have nothing, and you are about to make a vow never to have anything! Almsgiving, my dear Sisters, is within everyone’s reach. Pray for the holy souls in purgatory; pray for the poor sinners who try to have no God, and in their blindness endeavour to impress their principles on other minds. And our poor England! Ah! work and pray for its conversion. You see, you will never want for objects of your charitable alms.

“It is usual in the Institute to renew our vows every day at the Consecration in Holy Mass. You must learn the formula of renewal, and make frequent use of it. I advise you to renew your vows, not merely once a day, but often during the day, especially when under stress of temptation. The devil will soon leave us in peace when he finds his efforts make us more determined to attach ourselves solely and wholly to the sweet service of Our Lord.”

## CHAPTER XVII

### MISTRESS OF POSTULANTS

“ O strong of heart ! go on and bless  
Thy dear ones in calm tenderness !  
With thy serene, tenacious will  
To noblest aims devoted still,  
Ever alive to duty's call,  
Cherish, and guide, and cheer us all ! ”

LADY G. FULLERTON.

ON the 4th of October, 1852, Sister Clarie went to Northampton to give the habit to the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, and she remained there, gently to initiate them into the ways of Notre Dame. Shortly afterwards Sister Marie Thérésia left Namur, to begin at Clapham her thirty-three years of fruitful apostolate in England. Sister Mary of St. Francis was named to succeed her as Mistress of Postulants, and she held this office for nearly twelve years. Afterwards she became Mistress of Novices in the place of Mère Aloysie.

There was much about her likely to inspire her subordinates with confidence and respect, and nothing which they could not safely imitate. In her person she blended religious simplicity with great distinction of manner and bearing, and her most trivial gestures were full of grace and unassuming dignity. Exquisitely deferential towards her Superiors, she had a certain reverence in her way of dealing with those

under her, as far removed as possible from the condescension of conscious superiority. There was nothing unpleasantly dissecting in the penetrating glance of those clear, frank eyes. With magnificent faith and broad-minded charity she looked for the best in others, and ungenerous interpretations or narrow, unkindly criticisms were to her a sheer impossibility. The "Jerningham way" harmonized well with the spirit of charity, simplicity, and obedience which Blessed Julie wished to see characteristic of her children.

But it took the postulants some time to discover her good qualities. In the beginning they contrasted her, somewhat to her disadvantage, with the beloved mistress who had just left them. Sister Marie Thérésia was of a very sprightly disposition, which could extract amusement from the most commonplace occurrences, and had a cool, practical judgment, enabling her to turn the most untoward to the best advantage possible. Her sensitive heart felt keenly the separation from country and kindred, and the exchange of the bright community life at Namur for the "sea of troubles" incidental to her responsibilities in an unknown land, at a time, too, of acute "no-Popery" excitement. This did not, however, prevent her from enjoying her first "Fifth of November" in England, as she watched her own effigy paraded with contumely past the convent; and she ungrudgingly contributed her modest mite in the house-to-house collection for the expenses of the bonfire on the common.

"You are all witnesses," she said merrily to her Sisters, "that I have reached the third degree of humility, now that you have seen me pay sixpence to get myself burnt as a guy!"

The qualities which endeared Sister Marie Thérésia to her Sisters in religion, whether at Clapham or during



her twenty-seven years at Mount Pleasant, were already conspicuous before she left Namur. Her successor in office did not yield to her in inherent motherliness and in the firm fairness of her government. But the postulants found her at first reserved and retiring, and the idea they had formed of her previous position in Society did not lessen their embarrassment in her presence. The fact is, Sister Marie Thérésia had more surface-geniality, and her joyous manner made her exceedingly easy of access. She took the lead in conversation, keeping the whole company amused and interested at the recreation hour, and in private interviews going more than half-way to help the individual to express her thoughts.

Sister Mary of St. Francis, on the other hand, possessed in an eminent degree the rarer art of sympathetic listening. She could direct a conversation, and keep it from flagging, by some pregnant remark which might furnish occasion for wit in others ; but only with the exceptionally timid or the hopelessly dull did she deem it necessary, or for a limited season advisable, to do more than her fair share of the talking. In the beginning, as we have said, the postulants held somewhat aloof, but by degrees one after the other succumbed to the charm of her large-hearted patience and gentle amiability.

The last to yield was an English girl, who could not for a long while summon up courage to speak to her in private. The prudent mistress made no attempt to break the icy barrier of reticent awe, till at last the postulant (knowing well that a formal request for the habit was a necessary preliminary to admission among the novices) made a desperate effort to overcome her shyness, and knocked timidly at the dreaded door. On the instant the busy pen was laid aside, and a



pleasant smile and cheery words of welcome greeted the reluctant visitor.

"Well, my dear, so you have come at last! Now sit down, and tell me how you are getting on."

And then followed cordial inquiries about brothers and sisters and the old home life, till the chill reserve had completely thawed, and all too soon came the affectionate dismissal.

"Now, my dear, that you have found your way to this room, I do not think we shall be long without having another little talk."

There were many other little talks during the ensuing thirty-four years, for the friendship, begun that day, was cemented by confidential outpourings on the one part, and tokens of lovingly persistent solicitude on the other. Often did Sister Mary of St. Francis allude, with her own arch smile, to "some-one who would not come near me once," usually adding, however, in a tone of well-satisfied conviction:

"I don't think I have had to complain of *that* since."

Postulants among the Sisters of Notre Dame have no distinctive garb beyond a white muslin or lace cap, and when engaged in rough work, an apron of coarse blue linen. Social antecedents were thus somewhat emphasized in the bygone times of which we treat, when it was a favourite pastime among the boarders to note the not infrequent incongruity between costume and occupation. Sister Mary of St. Francis was very particular that her postulants should dress with due regard for the proprieties. She secured extra time for their toilet in the morning, so that their hair might be becomingly arranged; and when a set of them appeared at breakfast, looking limp and dowdy, as if their skirts did not fit, she sent them promptly upstairs to resume the discarded crinolines.

A Belgian postulant, not of the crinoline class, had the charge of cutting bread—no sinecure in a large establishment like Namur. “Sometimes,” she relates, “when I went to our dear mistress in her room, there were crumbs lodged in the folds of my gown. On every such occasion she fetched a clothes brush from her cupboard, and used it on me, as my own mother might have done.”

The views on dress of the new Mistress of Postulants differed materially from those of her predecessor. “Sister Marie Thérésia,” she once told the St. George’s Community, “had a horror of anything that savoured of worldliness; and when I entered, she was very much perturbed about a scarf I used to wear—one of those then in vogue, which were pinned securely in the centre of the back, and allowed to fall in graceful folds about the shoulders and arms. It was a very modest and becoming fashion, and as she did not actually forbid me to wear the obnoxious ‘shawl,’ as she called it, I remained impervious to her hints, though very much amused at their ingenious variety.”

There is no specified length for the postulate among the Sisters of Notre Dame, and Mrs. Petre, as we have seen, exchanged the scarf for the wimple after the lapse of a very few days. A candidate for admission to the Congregation comes to make practical trial of the life, and when she is satisfied that her vocation is genuine, she applies formally for the habit. It is an important duty, therefore, for the Mistress of Postulants to help those under her to see things in a true light, pointing out how groundless are their imaginary objections, and directing their attention to whatever might constitute a real obstacle to perseverance. She can also do a great deal to ease the transition from home comforts to community routine. Moreover, in a

cosmopolitan Order like that of Notre Dame, Sister Mary of St. Francis found it a distinct advantage to have fluent command of the English, French, and Italian languages, and to be able to converse in German without the need of an interpreter. Beginners in English were gratified by her remarks to them in that language, idiomatically graduated according to their proficiency; while with infinite patience she taught English girls to pronounce correctly little bits of spirituality in French with which to entertain and edify their companions during the time set apart for recreation.

At recreation, she exerted herself to promote the general enjoyment. "After working well," she used to say, "you need as much diversion as you can lawfully obtain; and though it is a praiseworthy practice to have some needlework between your fingers when the weather keeps us indoors, yet it must not engross your attention."

She was much amused one day when a new-comer expressed surprise that laughter and merriment could be considered pleasing to God.

"Ah, my dear, when you have lived as long as I have, you will have found out how little it takes to please our kind, good God."

Recreation, to her mind, was a prolific source of merit, and she advised, before beginning it, to invoke the Holy Ghost for charity, joy, peace, and patience.

Sunday morning was comparatively sedentary, and the noon recreation somewhat prolonged; so she liked on that day to explore with her postulants the rambling collection of buildings which made up the Mother-House, and to climb with them the church-tower, or the astronomical belvedere attached to the boarding-

school, for a bird's-eye view of the premises, as well as of the Valley of the Meuse.

"You are children of the house," she said, "and ought to know your way about your home. Besides, when you are sent to help in any particular spot, you will waste no time getting lost on the way."

Sister Mary of St. Francis was extremely careful not to require too much from new-comers, but to accustom them gradually to the first difficulties of religious life. "When I entered in 1853," writes Sister Mary of St. Philip, "I found in her the tenderest and most sympathetic of mothers to one still smarting from the pang of leaving home. Yet there was something so supernatural about her that she lifted me unconsciously into a higher atmosphere, where her own life of perfect sacrifice and self-denial made me blush for half-heartedness and cowardice."

"In the beginning of my time," writes another, "she noticed that a sad expression often stole over my features. She questioned me kindly, and I told her that the loss of my mother made itself continually felt. The sweet look on her face urged me to say :

" ' *You* must be a mother to me, and take her place.' "

" ' Indeed, indeed, I will, my poor child !' she said, and, drawing me towards her, she pressed my head between her hands. Very faithfully did she keep her word. I have always found her full of delicate attentions, forestalling my every need."

In collecting information from those who have known her, whether as postulants or as novices, one is struck by the unvarying tribute to the motherliness of Sister Mary of St. Francis. It requires judicious pressing to elicit details, and the homely anecdotes go far to prove that her kindness was as wise-headed as it was large-hearted. Instances abound of her tact

in saying what must hurt in such a manner that it left no sting; of her sympathetic understanding of family troubles and her royal memory for relationships; of her attentions and care for the sick; of the wonderful efficacy of her word and smile to chase away sadness and encourage to vigorous virtue; of her playful condoning of the giddiness due to the exuberance of youth (throwing snowballs at cats, for instance), and her grave pained attitude towards faults of a more serious nature. Now it is a postulant who attempts to finish a day of low spirits by a night vigil in the church, and is sent off to bed with a glass of wine and a biscuit; now it is a novice checked in her frequent breaches of the rule of silence by the gentle reminder:

“Child, child! do you ever hear Our Lord speaking in the Tabernacle?”

“Do you find it too hard to be carrying hot water for the boarders, while the others are quietly at meditation in the chapel?” she asked a peasant girl, who told her in reply she was accustomed to far harder work than that.

“I am certain you never had much to do before six in the morning, my dear. Be sure to tell me if you find it too much for you.”

Such details are trivial if taken one by one; but when we consider that they were of daily occurrence, that every Sister who lived under her can corroborate each statement with kindred experiences, that each regarded herself as singled out for special kindness, it becomes fairly evident that Sister Mary of St. Francis's heart overflowed with generous tenderness, and that the phrase so often repeated in the Sisters' reminiscences, “She was a mother to me,” sums up exactly her love for one and all of her religious children.

Her own motives, views, and feelings were so essen-



tially noble that it was a common wonder how clearly and thoroughly she could grasp the difficulties of lesser natures. Yet all agree that she could, by some marvellous intuition, put her finger exactly on the sore spot, and apply at once a remedy, or trace a course of action perfectly suited to the individual and the circumstances. Her ideal was high, and she nerved all to realize it.

A young, impulsive girl of seventeen applied for admission as a postulant, but it was deemed prudent to try her as a boarder first. We give her experience in her own words:

"Fortunately—the term seems a strange one—I broke my leg just a fortnight after my arrival at dear Namur. Yes, I repeat it, fortunately; for some of my happiest hours were spent in St. Roch (the infirmary). Here, dear Sister Mary of St. Francis paid me such charming visits, and sweetly and gently taught me to bear the pain I was suffering—and it was very great—at first with patience, and then with joy. 'You know,' she repeated pleasantly, 'a Sister of Notre Dame has to be brave.'

"I felt leaving the infirmary more than anyone could guess; but the confidential relations were established, and during my two years at school I had no secrets or troubles that I did not tell her. She helped me in a thousand ways. I never had to ask for anything. She forestalled all my wants, and always saw that I was supplied with pocket-money. I owe her a debt of gratitude that nothing can ever repay. None but her own sweet self could have borne with me as she did, and if I am a Sister of Notre Dame to-day, I may, after God, thank her."

Partly to keep her from occasions of too familiar intercourse with her former companions, this young



lady's domestic duties, when at last she was allowed to don the cap, were confined in the main to the community quarters.

"One day," she continues, "I had cleaned our refectory my very best. The floor looked splendid, and I was feeling very elate, when another postulant passed through with a leaky bucket of water. I scolded her, and she laughed back some joking retort. Boiling with rage, I ran straight to our mistress's room, and wound up the hot tale of my grievance with: 'Now, wasn't she a horrid thing?'"

"Dear Sister Mary of St. Francis listened to me in patience, and then asked me to sit down on a low chair, as she had some letters to write. When she had finished one, she looked up smiling, and . . . began another. As she blotted the last page of that one, she remarked quietly: 'Is it worth troubling your little head about such a trifle? It strikes me, *you* were the *horrid thing*! Now, would not Almighty God be better pleased if you went nicely to say you were sorry for your rude remarks?'"

"And tracing a little cross upon my forehead, she sent me away, fully persuaded I was the one to blame, and ready and happy to ask pardon."

It was rare that Sister Mary of St. Francis found it necessary to administer a formal rebuke, but with all her kindness and frank humility it was impossible to take liberties in her presence. She communicated to others some portion of that "fine reserve and courteous reticence" which in her was always suggestive of a life lived consciously in the sight of God.

"We are, in His Holy Presence, like sponges in water," she was fond of saying. "The cleaner the sponge, the more water it is able to absorb."

And so she spared no effort to prevent failings from

crystallizing into defects. The wayward postulant already quoted needed occasionally some very straight talking. She goes on:

"Another time, when one of her remarks did not please me, I burst out with: 'Oh, how nasty!'

"She just smiled her own dear smile, and went on with what she had to say—some richly deserved rebuke for one of my many misdeeds. Then she asked me to fetch the dictionary from the bookshelf in her room, and, turning over the leaves, showed me the definition of *nasty*.

"'Now,' said she, 'do you really think I am that?'

"'Oh no!' I cried. 'You know I meant nothing of the sort!'

"'Yes, I know; but you must really learn to measure your words. Anyone who did not know you as well as I do might have felt hurt and insulted.'

"And she broke off with a merry laugh at seeing my blank look of dismay."

This is one out of many instances of her watchfulness over the diction of young religious. Stilted and affected phraseology offended alike her simplicity and her good taste, but she had more often to check these young people for thoughtless exaggerations like the above, and borrowings from the French—the style of translation which Lord Byron exemplifies and condemns as *traducing*. With her a *guimpe*, for instance, was always a *wimple*, and *reading* never degenerated into *lecture*. She considered, however, as far otherwise important the selection of ideas to be expressed or repressed.

"Heart and brain," she often repeated, "are alike concerned in the mechanism of the tongue, in token, say the old mystics, that our words should be the outcome of charity and of prudence." She was fond, too,

of quoting Faber's axiom: "The best part of a man's treasure of merits are the things he has left unsaid." And she had well worked into her own life the lines of Newman:

"Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control  
That o'er thee swell and throng:  
They will condense within thy soul  
And change to purpose strong."

Silence, outside the hours allotted to recreation, is, of course, an essential practice in all religious communities, and Sister Mary of St. Francis was very particular that all under her care should realize from the first its dignity as a virtue. She was careful to point out—in the true Notre Dame spirit—that a brief explanation is at all times preferable to childish pantomime, and that a studied omission of the customary forms of courtesy is alike opposed to religious simplicity and politeness; but she saw to it that no time was wasted in useless conversation, however innocent or edifying.

There was a novice, for instance, so delighted to meet some old school friends, that she literally forgot the rule of silence, the rule forbidding unauthorized intercourse with seculars, and the hour of a community meeting at which she should have been present.

"I received so severe a rebuke," she tells us, "that it is fresh in my memory after a lapse of thirty years. Not long afterwards a former class-mistress of mine came to Namur, and (not to do wrong again) I was careful to provide myself beforehand with permission to talk to her.

" 'You may stay a quarter of an hour,' answered Sister Mary of St. Francis.

" 'Only a quarter of an hour!' I petulantly exclaimed. 'I prefer not to go at all.'

“ ‘ You will certainly go to her for that time, and no longer,’ was the quiet and decided reply. ‘ It is only right to show gratitude and affection to one who has been kind to you in the past. But a quarter of an hour is all you need.’ ”

In this matter, as in so many others, her practice tallied with her precept. How often in her visits to Secondary Houses, or when any of her former novices returned to Namur, did she check the impulsive eagerness of some young Sister by the genial whisper: “ I shall be delighted to have a talk with you, my dear, but first I must ask Ma Mère’s leave ! ”

Nor were the postulants less edified by her scrupulous fidelity to this point of the Rule.

“ I had spent a charming half hour with her,” writes one, “ chatting about people we both knew, and places we had often visited. To my surprise, she came to me a little later and expressed regret that she had given me bad example by indulging in unprofitable conversation.”

Sister Mary of St. Francis had not often occasion for such frank apology. Throughout her religious career she never found it difficult to conform to the rule of silence. While still in the world, as her diaries testify, she had schooled herself to control her imagination and be mistress of her thoughts, and she thus attained (it is Mère Constantine who says it) “ the virtue of interior silence in a very marked degree.” The advantages she herself reaped from this mental discipline made her earnest in her advice to postulants and novices.

“ Admit into your soul only those thoughts which come from God, or which tend towards Him, and you will find that control of the tongue will come of itself.”

Such restraint is especially valuable as a safeguard

against failings in charity. She had a very tender conscience in this respect.

"I have heard that his father was a *mauvais sujet*," said a very youthful postulant in allusion to a mutual acquaintance. She drew herself up at once with great dignity. "I know nothing about that," she freezingly observed; and her look implied: "If you know anything to his discredit, you would do well to keep it to yourself."

A novice once found her looking grave and pre-occupied.

"Dear Mère St. Francis, have I displeased you in any way?"

"No, child—no; but last night I dreamt that I spoke very crossly to someone, and I do not like to be unkind to anybody even in my sleep."

Not less edifying to these beginners in the religious life, not less fruitful in its effect on their after-career, was the old-fashioned spirit of deference to authority which overflowed from her heart into theirs. She was devotedly loyal to her Superiors, and loved them with a truly spiritual and intense love. During the first twelve years after her profession, her duties brought her into close touch with the Mistress of Novices, whom she was careful to consult on every occasion that differed from the ordinary routine.

"Her obedience was perfect," said Mère Aloysie. "She used constantly to refer to me matters which she could quite well have settled for herself. How often I have had to say to her: 'Surely you have sense and judgment enough to answer a question like that?'"

But Sister Mary of St. Francis persisted in her attitude of dependent submission. By word and example she instilled into her postulants her own loving confi-



dence towards her colleague in the noviciate, and never missed an opportunity of expressing her esteem.

“ You amuse me,” she writes to a Sister in England, “ with your puzzle of how to treat your pupils. *I* should say: ‘ With respect.’ If you want a model, think of Sister Aloysie’s gentle and equably serious and earnest manner. You have not forgotten that ?”

It was truly admirable to witness the union of aims and interests between these two humble religious. The knowledge of the close friendship and mutual esteem which existed between them exercised a salutary influence over those under their care.

“ We felt free,” remarks a novice of the period, “ to consult either of our mistresses, just as we wished. Each seemed to say: ‘ Seek the advice of my colleague; she is wiser than I, and her counsels are better worth following.’ ”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### MA MÈRE ST. FRANÇOIS

“ . . . Holy Church hath received you :

She knows nought of compulsion and only conviction desireth.  
This is the hour of your trial, the turning-point of existence,  
Seed for the coming days.”

LONGFELLOW.

THE world estimated in its own way the sacrifice made by Mrs. Petre on entering Religion, but to those who knew the secret of her happiness there was evident compensation in full and overflowing measure. Our Blessed Lord's promise of the hundredfold on earth to those who leave all for His sake was literally fulfilled in her case, and for a heart like hers human friendship was a valued part of the hundredfold.

There were many friends in the world whose company she had sacrificed at the call of Christ, but she found in Religion other friends with whom to form a delightful union of hearts. Montalembert tells us in his *Monks of the West* of the holy affection existing between brethren in the early days of monasticism, and such were the ties which united Sister Mary of St. Francis to Mère Constantine and Mère Aloysie—ties so evident even to outsiders that the pupils at Namur came at last to speak of the three holy friends as “ the earthly Trinity.” This “ triple cord not easily broken ” was to be knit still firmer by a grief shared in common.

One of Mère Constantine's first acts as Superior-General had been to appoint a local Superior at Namur, Sister Augustine, a holy and talented religious, in whose favour very many votes had been cast at the recent election. For twenty years the two worked together in perfect harmony, to the great advantage of the whole Congregation. When it pleased God, in the summer of 1864, to call Sister Augustine to Himself, Mère Constantine felt the loss acutely, and Mère Aloysie and Sister Mary of St. Francis vied with one another in their delicate solicitude to alleviate her grief. Accompanied by the one or the other, she was to be met with more frequently than was her wont outside her own room, and it was noticed that the novices at this period received a large share of her attention.

She and Sister Mary of St. Francis came one day upon a group of these young people secretly engaged in the artistic concoction of hearts in painted cardboard to form part of the scheme of decoration for the noviciate on the 21st of June, the name-day of their beloved mistress. Flaming red hearts they were, about five inches in diameter, and from each issued a scroll with appropriate sentences in the languages distinguishing the diverse nationalities represented in the noviciate—German, Dutch, Flemish and French (more than one variant of the *langue d'oïl*), English, Italian, Irish, and Welsh.

"What big hearts! Whose are they?" queried Mère Constantine.

"Ours, of course, Ma Mère. They may well be big; they are the hearts of the novices."

And she at once: "Do you know, my dear children, that big hearts should be ready for a big sacrifice?"

The Feast of St. Aloysius came and went—a day of innocent mirth for the white-veiled band, followed by

another of calm spiritual enjoyment; for Mass was said in the little garden chapel, which they looked upon as their special care, and the Blessed Sacrament remained in the Tabernacle there until evening, the object of their loving adoration.

On the morrow Mère Constantine came to the novices alone—a most unusual proceeding.

“My dear children,” she began, “I told you the other day that big hearts must be ready for big sacrifices, and now I have come to tell you something which I know will cause pain to each one. I have just given Sister Aloysie to the professed Sisters to be their Superior. Do not be vexed with me, my dears; I could not help myself.”

Here she made a pause, as if to allow her listeners some vent to the grief they could not hide. Never, they thought, had she looked more motherly, as she sat in their midst, her own eyes full of tears, whispering broken words of comfort. They made a gallant effort to stem their emotion, and after a while she resumed in a more cheerful strain:

“It will be some consolation to you all—especially to you, my dear English children—that I am giving you in exchange one whom you have already learnt to love. You have all had experience of the kind-heartedness of your new Mother, Mère Marie de St. François. Oh, my dears! we must shorten that name; it is far too long for daily use. How would it be if we called her *Ma Mère St. François*? I hope she will have none but good accounts to give me of you all, that you bear up bravely, and—like true religious—conform in this, as in everything else, your wills to that of your Superiors.”

Some carved oak fittings were being adjusted that afternoon in the little chapel in the garden. The work-

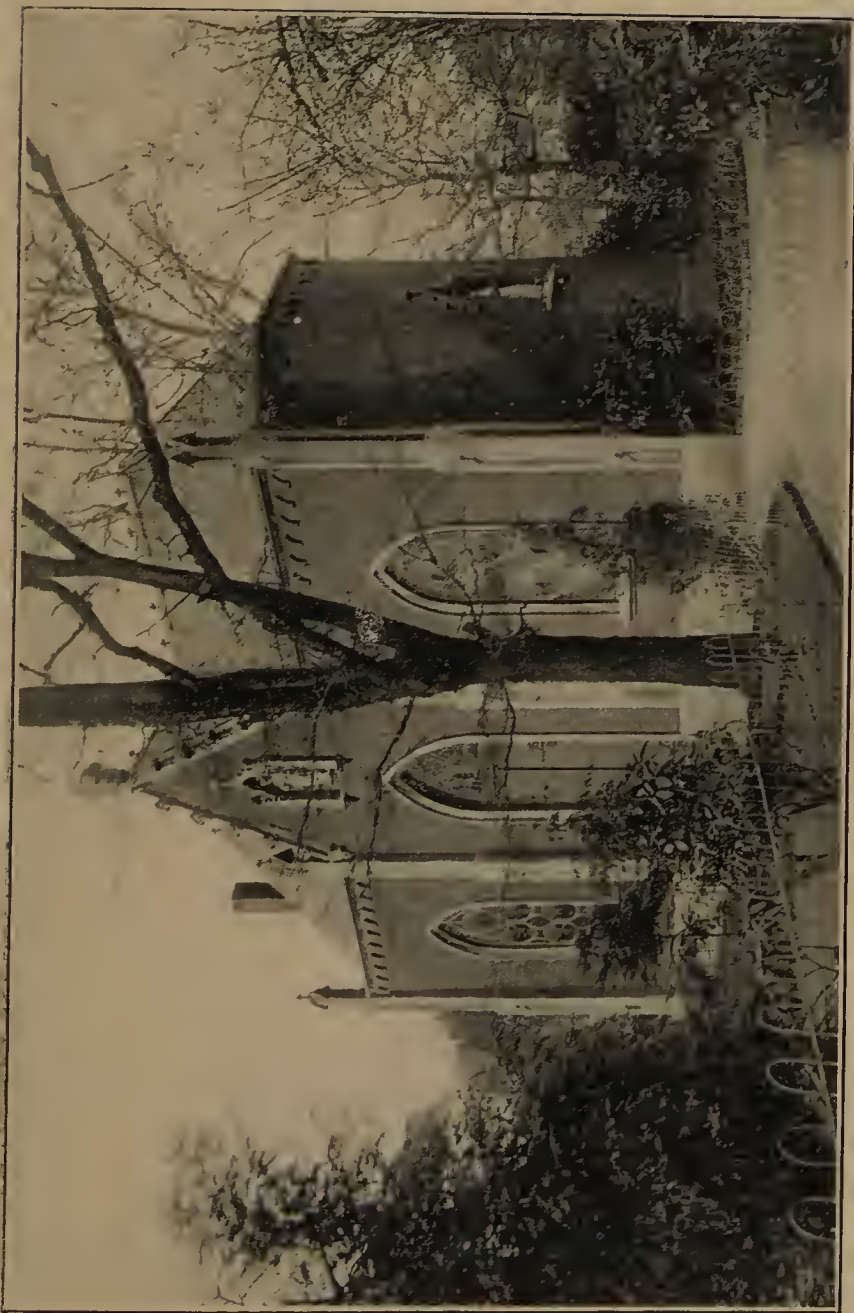
men were much mystified as, one after another, the white-veiled figures stole in for a quiet cry. The professed had already acclaimed their new Superior with song and joyous ceremonial, but the installation of Mère St. François was a very simple affair. The novices assembled in the evening to welcome her, and she embraced each in turn—not the stiff accolade so dear to foreigners, but a genuine, motherly, English kiss. One, a very recent import from the postulate, said impulsively as she returned the caress:

“ Oh, dear Mère St. Francis, how glad I am to have you again !”

But her exuberance was instantly checked. “ Hush, dear—hush ! You must not show such joy. Consider the other poor things, how it jars upon their grief !”

This time no efforts were needed to win the affection of her young charges. Their hearts were hers from the beginning. “ She understood our position so well,” writes one, looking back on that memorable time. “ We had not to feign a joy we did not feel. We were consoled in some measure by Mère Constantine’s promise, faithfully kept, that not only would Mère Aloysie—how hard we found it to call her Sister Superior !—finish her course of instruction on the Vows, but that we should each one of us see her privately in her room more than once before the September retreat.

“ How edified we were those first few weeks, and, indeed, all through our time, by our new mistress’s evident anxiety to maintain unaltered every little custom and pious practice in force under her predecessor ! ‘ I will find out what Sister Superior thinks,’ was a phrase very frequently on her lips. We were accustomed to come to our mistress in the refectory



CHAPEL IN THE CONVENT GARDEN, NAMUR







after meals, to acknowledge the mishaps of the day or our own exterior breaches of Rule. 'No need to speak so loud,' was at first her whispered comment; but she owned she was wrong as soon as she found that Ma Mère Aloysie thought it a help to humility to make such statements distinctly audible.

"In the beginning both our dear mistresses came to us at the Instruction hour. Sister Superior addressed us as usual, and Ma Mère St. Francis, sitting on her right, but a little in the background, listened attentively, as if humbly studying her method and phraseology. Her own instructions were very carefully prepared, and usually a scrap of paper contained the brief notes from which she intended to speak. Often before beginning she would beckon to a well-educated Parisian among us, and consult her as to the gender of a word or the classic correctness of an idiom or phrase."

Her voice was rich and pleasantly modulated. Full, resonant, and melodious, it vibrated with the strength of her convictions and the intensity of her emotions. Rarely raised to its full power, it held in its harmonious tones a quiet authority which irresistibly compelled attention. We give the substance of one of her instructions, just as an English novice reproduced it in her mother-tongue. The use of the first personal pronoun throughout is characteristic of her frank humility, and the theme selected is that interior silence, that intimate union with God, which formed the cornerstone of her own spiritual edifice.

"Our life is active and contemplative. About the active part we need not trouble overmuch; it comes easy enough, and depends on circumstances more or less. Not so the contemplative. That requires real steady effort, not such strenuous effort as will unduly tax our minds—break our heads *you* call it—but quiet,

persistent, earnest effort, which slowly, but very certainly, will win for us in time the true interior spirit.

“What have we to live for but God? Why have we given up everything and entered religion, if not to devote ourselves wholly to His service? It is sweet to think that He is always with us, loving us, and sharing our joys and griefs. When I consider all He is to us, I wonder how we can bear to forget Him for a moment. He is to be our only happiness, our every happiness in eternity. Why not begin *now* to think of Him, love Him, and give Him glory, as it will be our delight to do in heaven?

“Poor worldlings seek for success or personal satisfaction in all they do. We have a nobler incentive, and so we should never be too engrossed in our daily work, but keep for God the best part of ourselves—the higher powers of mind, heart, and will—and lend ourselves to our daily tasks, quietly and sweetly doing our little best, and leaving the issue in the hands of our loving Father, without anxiety or fear of failure. Let us often pause in the midst of our duties to ask His blessing on us and our work, so that it may be all for His greater glory. And we will not ask alone. Our Blessed Lady is our Mother and our Patroness. Let us always remember that, and implore throughout the day her help, her guidance, and her efficacious intercession.

“If we are faithful to God, His blessing will rest on our work, and then it is sure to succeed. Our children will draw profit from our instructions in proportion to our holiness and union with God; so you see, my dear Sisters, our influence over others depends, after all, on ourselves.”

These words reveal the secret of the speaker's own successful Apostolate. It is the custom in Notre Dame

to make a pause at recreation, for the interchange of holy thoughts—short pithy sentences, culled from some favourite author or evolved from one's inner consciousness, but in either case always prefaced by a modest, "I remember." On one such occasion Sister Mary of St. Francis gave utterance to her favourite maxim:

"Ma Mère, I remember that we should give ourselves to God and lend ourselves to creatures."

"Is that what you do, Ma Sœur St. François?"

"It is what I try to do, Ma Mère."

Let us hear from her own lips how the practice worked out in her life:

"However distracting be the nature of our duties, we must, as religious, keep closely united to God. As a good solid *foundation* for this union let us acquire the habit of recollecting His Holy Presence at all times, and of thinking how to please Him while teaching or at other work. It may be hard at first, but habit overcomes habit, and we shall be so sweetly rewarded in a short time with unspeakable consolation.

"The corner-stone of this foundation is the secret of securing the early morning for God alone. Let us give Him this, without thinking or troubling about what comes after. We begin, on awakening, by offering Him our hearts and all we are and do. We are careful, while dressing, to say the customary little prayers, and then there is the meditation—an hour wrapt up in God. Believe me, Sisters, the rest of the day depends upon our earnestness in this important duty. Never mind drowsiness or distractions; only let us be careful always to prepare the points beforehand.

"Then follows the greatest of all actions—the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, when we are, as it were, on

Calvary, and the Precious Blood of Jesus is flowing anew to wash away our sins and purify our souls. Then is the time to draw down abundant graces upon ourselves, our dear ones, the Institute, and the whole Church.

“ These two hours spent every day with Jesus must be our harvest-time, when we store up graces against the needs of the day; and I think, when they are over, it is quite soon enough to trouble about the duties and cares of life.”

At nightfall, the Angelus Bell again summons the daughters of Blessed Julie to familiar converse with Jesus, and for this meditation no formal points are needed, or, indeed, advised. It is the hour, as one of them has expressed it in song :

“ When captain and men find rest and light  
’Neath the lamp in our good King’s Tent.”

Let us see how Sister Mary of St. Francis advised her novices to employ these precious moments :

“ When the work of the day is ended, we should fly to God in our evening meditation. Yes; fly to Jesus, just as a little child flies to its mother from whom it has been for some hours separated. We should be so happy to be once more alone and quiet with our dear Lord, to have leisure to talk to Him of all our struggles, and sufferings, and pleasures. Let us fly to Him, then, and rest in Him; for He is our Spouse, and He loves us, understands us, and in His Omnipotence is longing to help us.

“ Oh, my dear Sisters, above all things else, take pains to cultivate the interior spirit. Guard it, foster it, and remember that God values more one *interior* soul than hundreds who are absorbed in active works of mercy, to the detriment of their spiritual life. Let



us keep vigilant guard over our thoughts, words, and actions. Whatever we do for God is something worth ; but the rest may be reckoned as dross, without value in His eyes, and unprofitable for us."

Such discourses found a responsive echo in the hearts of her eager listeners. All had high ideals ; and if in practice they did not always attain the standard contemplated, they could discuss the reason of their failures with their sympathetic mistress in her private room, and come from the interview braced to fresh endeavour ; for a rare power of entering into the difficulties of others—difficulties which must often have seemed childish to her great and simple mind—was not the least attractive of her gifts.

If a Sister in trouble gave vent to her tears, Mère St. François was visibly distressed. She could not bear to witness intense grief, but she seldom attempted to check its display.

" It does you good to have a hearty cry," she usually said. " Sit down by me, dear, and weep freely. By-and-by we will talk things over."

Then she would turn to her writing, so as to get the better of her own emotion, and, when the right moment had come, lay down her pen (for she never listened as one interrupted in graver business), fold her hands on her knees, around her crucifix, and speak with such large sympathy and exquisite tact that the mourner went from her presence with will invigorated and mind refreshed, with heart encouraged and consoled.

We readily admit to all who have lived with Mère St. François that this general sketch falls far short of the reality. The particular instances which have come down to us make it clear that there was nothing effeminate in her candid counsels.

" Throughout my noviciate," one Sister writes, " she

never hid any difficulties I was likely to encounter, always telling me there was no merit without sacrifice, no sacrifice without suffering, and that sacrifice and suffering were essentials in the religious life."

"When I received my first mission," writes another, "I was helping the portress. I came crying from Ma Mère's room, and quite expected to be allowed to go to the little chapel; but Ma Mère St. Francis told me to go back straight to the door, and pay no heed to my feelings. 'Duty comes first!' she said."

She asked a novice, who lamented her lack of spiritual consolation at the time of Holy Communion: "Is it for that you go to Holy Communion? Then I am not surprised that you are disappointed. As for me, I go to get help to become good—more like Jesus Christ, our Divine Master and Model."

Another novice, given to make much of petty annoyances, tells us she was cured by this sensible remark:

"Why, Sister, if you persist in piling up memories of bygone disagreeables, you will soon accumulate a mountain of them, and how will you manage to get on beneath the load? Better shake the day's troubles off at bedtime, so as to start afresh in the morning without them."

To one who felt hurt because others seemed to make light of her sufferings, she said very earnestly: "God measures our crosses by the pain we have in bearing them, not by the way others look at them. He knows."

"Do not say, 'I cannot stand this!'" she warned another. "Rather, tell yourself: 'I can stand it, and I will stand it, to please God!' Then, when the moment of trial comes, He will make it issue in victory; and not only will you please God, but also you will find that you please those with whom you have to live, and thus avoid needless miseries and troubles."



Many of the difficulties confided to her were, of course, connected with obedience. "You find it hard to submit your will to that of another," she told a postulant; "but, my dear, do you not know the words of Holy Writ: 'He that followeth his own will hath a fool for master'?"

More effective still was the grave rebuke to a novice, who had failed to carry out an arrangement—a trifling one, it seemed to her—in the manner prescribed. "Do you know, my dear, that you cannot act as you have done to-day when you have made your vows?"

But an obedient religious is not a mere unreasoning machine. "The Rule cannot foresee every circumstance," she was careful to explain, "but a good will meets all contingencies. So, when you are told to do something unpleasant, or which you think above your capacity, go cheerfully and do the best you can."

"When we find anything really too difficult," she said again, "let us remember the good old practice of doing all for God. It has already brought us a great many graces, and with God's help will bring us many more. Believe me, child, and be persuaded, among the means which lead souls to perfection there is nothing better or more pleasing to God than a simple yielding to His holy Will, and a filial attention to His Presence."

It has been said, erroneously, that Mère St. François knew not how to reprimand. Failings in obedience or charity she never allowed to pass unrebuked, and those due to levity brought, if habitual, such a pained look into those grave brown eyes that words were seldom needed to engender healthy shame and effectual resolve. "She looked at us," says one of her own novices, "through the medium of her own beautiful thoughts, and saw every particle of good that was to be seen."

It was impossible to indulge in selfish aims or worldly ideas while under her influence."

First offences were readily condoned, mishaps due to clumsiness she helped to rectify, and in all cases the sweet reasonableness of her remarks made things appear in their right perspective. "What a pity to waste tears over such a trifle!" she observed, when a novice came to tell her, between sobs and gasps, that she had just burnt a large hole in the front breadth of her habit. "Be thankful that it is your habit which is injured, and not yourself, and come with me to get the mischief mended."

"Shortly after I took the religious habit," writes a Sister, "Ma Mère St. Francis asked me quietly in her room if I were sick, as several Sisters had been noticing my poor looks. I answered that I supposed my interior disturbances were showing themselves openly, that I could not suit myself at all to my present life. She asked me what things in particular went against the grain. I told her I could lay my finger upon nothing; it was not one thing, but everything that I disliked. She told me she could quite understand my feelings, for I had been for some time mistress of my actions, and made much of at home, and now the change to the noviciate, where nobody thought more of me than of the others, would naturally have a lowering effect upon my system, though I did not myself realize the cause of the depression. 'However,' she added, 'I hope things will go right in time.' I then mentioned, as a definite trouble, that I could not find my way about. 'Never mind that,' she answered, with a merry laugh; 'you can never lose yourself so completely that we cannot find you.'"

The sick and ailing always drew this good Mother like a magnet, and many are the grateful allusions in

the Sisters' reminiscences to her thoughtful solicitude and delicate attentions. For each and all the inmates of the convent—professed, novices, postulants, and pupils—her presence in a sick-room was like sunshine.

When the cholera broke out in Belgium, in 1866, some of the Sisters were attacked, and if none succumbed, if the spread of the scourge was quickly arrested, the doctor attending the community attributed it less to his skill than to her devotedness and experience. She knew exactly how to deal with its several stages, when to feed and when to starve, and how to brighten and encourage the invalids, and coax their appetite in the weak days of convalescence.

There was much extra prayer in the community that God would vouchsafe to shorten the scourge over Belgium. Sister Mary of St. Francis seems to have been given a free hand as to ventilation and diet in the Mother-House. In concert with Mère Constantine and Sister Superior Aloysie, she set an example of calm trust in God, and exerted herself by extra recreations and pleasant surprises to promote the general cheerfulness, thus minimizing the chances of contagion due to panic fear.

But it was not merely in seasons of epidemic that she liked to see smiling faces around her. "I am glad to hear you are merry," she writes to a novice, "because in your case high spirits are a sign of fervour and fidelity to your duties."

Her own gentle gaiety always made recreation in her company a real treat, and it was sometimes a temptation to slip away before work had ended in kitchen and scullery, so as to secure "a good place" near her chair.

"I should like to see you anxious to secure a *good* place in heaven," she told such shirkers. "We are

not servants or hirelings, but children in our Father's house, striving our utmost to have everything in order, just as He likes to see it."

And when a novice, hoping for sympathy, complained of feeling tired, "Tired!" she exclaimed. "Is it not delightful to feel tired because we have been working with Our Lord? tired because we have been spending our strength helping others for the love of His love? Ah, what happiness at the hour of death, if our lives have been one long *run* in the service of so good a Master!"

Thus did this zealous religious profit on every occasion to train her novices thoroughly, and to inflame them with her own enthusiastic love for God and for their neighbour. "All she said," notes one, "was beautifully simple and naturally expressed; but it always seemed to me as if the supernatural were so vivid to her that she realized the soul in the person whom she addressed."

Long before Bishop Ullathorne had given to the world his volume on Christian Patience, Sister Mary of St. Francis had discovered for herself and taught to others that our charity must be sufficiently clear-sighted to recognize the limitations inherent in human virtue. "The bad qualities which we notice in others," she wrote, "should serve, not to weaken, but to perfect and purify our charity in their regard. Their virtue has its limits, the motive of our charity has none; for we love our neighbour as one whom Almighty God has substituted in His own stead, to be loved with a kindly, effective, all-embracing charity."

Among these "substitutes for God," those invested with authority held a place apart in her loyal esteem. "When our Superiors are pleased with us," she said, "it follows generally that God is also pleased; so let



us always keep on their side, helping them and giving them real consolation, like good and dutiful daughters of our dear Mère Julie.’

Realizing how important it is in an institute so centralized as Notre Dame that each individual should revere the Superior-General with filial confidence, she was ingenious in contriving occasions for her novices to come in immediate contact with Mère Constantine. “Notre chère Mère,” writes a Sister, “was the personification of all that is frank, firm, and delicately kind. She had very piercing eyes, which seemed to read people through and through. She riveted them on me at our first encounter, and her greeting, ‘We shall see what God will make out of you,’ was not exactly calculated to lessen the sense of awe which only increased in intensity all the time I was a postulant. Soon after I took the habit I was sent for to her room. She put a book in my hands, and asked me to read aloud. When I had regained my natural tones (half-way down the page), the book was exchanged for a sheet of music, and she asked me to sing. I was less nervous over this, and managed better from the beginning. ‘Now,’ she said, ‘we have made acquaintance at last. You have read for me and sung for me, so you need no longer be afraid of me.’ And her tone and her kindness had the intended effect.”

English novices, in particular, who would not have much chance after profession of personal intercourse with the Mother-House, were often selected to assist the portress, as this charge involved frequent visits to Ma Mère’s room. The Reverend Mother was extremely gracious to these young foreigners whenever she met them about the house, greeting them pleasantly with the English phrases at her command, and sometimes

slyly reminding them there was no equivalent in French for "comfortable," and that no Belgian could be guilty of the ejaculation, "Dear *me*!"

Besides these casual meetings, she paid informal visits to the White Veils, at work or at play. Once, while some structural alterations were in progress, the novices were at table with their mistress, amid surroundings of lath and plaster, and shavings from the joiner's bench.

"Oh, this will never do!" exclaimed Mère Constantine, as she arrived impromptu on the scene.

"Why, Ma Mère, it is charming!" replied Sister Mary of St. Francis, who enjoyed the fun of the picnic as much as the youngest novice. "It reminds us all of the Holy House at Nazareth. Only our poor dear Blessed Lady and St. Joseph never sat down to such a good dinner as this!"

In February, 1868, the Silver Jubilee of Mère Constantine, as Head of the Institute, gave a chance to the novices to give tangible proof of their loyal attachment. They were ubiquitous, helping to make the preparations in every department result in success, and filling up their intervals of leisure by sewing garments for the poor; for in every festivity connected with Mère Constantine almsgiving had to hold an important and honourable place.

Meanwhile, their mistress, in concert with Sister Superior Aloysie, was organizing special thanksgivings throughout the Institute, and assisting their beloved Mother to deal promptly and graciously with the visits and letters of congratulation which kept pouring in from the outside. None of these letters gave greater pleasure to Sister Mary of St. Francis than one from her old friend Dr. Grant, stating that he had successfully petitioned the Holy Father for "a plenary indul-



gence for every Sister of Notre Dame on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of Rev. Mother Constantine, who has founded fifty-five houses of her Congregation during the twenty-five years of her Generalate."

But Jubilees in Notre Dame have usually the Cross for companion, and this time it came in the form of illness to the Mistress of Novices. She had never been very strong since the death of Isabella in 1847—the diaries of her widowhood contain frequent reference to sick headaches as hindering business or Mass. Though her health in this respect had somewhat improved during her first years as a religious, she had always been regarded at Namur as one needing extra care, and from the very beginning a Sister had been told off to see that she had everything she required. Now acute rheumatism and gout set in, and the doctor declared it was absolutely necessary that she should be relieved of some of her duties. So, in April, a new Mistress of Novices was appointed, and for the next seven years Sister Mary of St. Francis had considerably more leisure to devote to the business of the Institute in her native land.

## CHAPTER XIX

### IN ENGLAND WITH MÈRE CONSTANTINE

“Lumen Gentium ! ah ! yes,  
It shines all England o’er,  
It falls across Mère Julie’s face  
As once it fell before ;  
Only—the vision seems more bright  
Seen from a heavenly shore.”

S. M. X.

THE Mother-House at Namur is the centre and, as it were, the great pulsating heart of the Congregation of Notre Dame. With it are connected all the other houses, scattered as they are nowadays in three continents, but depending for their very existence on the word of obedience going forth from the Superior-General. Residence at Namur gives an idea of all that is going on in the Institute, much in the same way as from the heights on which the citadel is built a panorama of the city below is unrolled before the eyes of the observer. And Namur, for the whole of her religious life, was Sister Mary of St. Francis’s beloved home.

In the various important offices which she filled successively and simultaneously, she came in contact, as time went on, with all the Sisters, and she visited the various houses in Belgium as well as in England. All were dear to her, since all formed part of the Institute with which she had identified herself; but the English foundations were especially dear, and from her post at

Namur she watched with untiring solicitude over the welfare and interests of the different communities. Her wide outlook and all-embracing charity become more fully illustrated as the years go by, but even from the outset there is a peculiar difficulty to seize upon facts and make them salient in the record of one who was always so unobtrusive and so inclined to put others forward as the immediate instruments of her generosity and zeal. "So," it has been remarked in no irreverent spirit, "the Apostles, and not Our Lord, may have been supposed, by many who received bread from their baskets, to have worked the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand."

Every morning a pile of letters reached her, bearing the English post-mark, and, having applied for permission to open them—a general permission granted once for all did not satisfy her love of obedience—she set herself to master their contents. As the day wore on, an answering pile was being steadily accumulated on the plain deal table, painted black, which served her for *escritoire*. Marvels of concision and clearness were these letters, in the opinion of competent business men. "Seldom or never," said a lawyer, "do they contain an unnecessary word." But so personal are their contents, so exactly adapted to the matter in hand, as to be practically useless for insertion in the pages of her biography. Many a time, when the six o'clock bell summoned the Sisterhood for work and reading in the "Sainte Famille," as we call the Community Room, she had to ask leave to absent herself, in order to get her letters finished by post-time. A quiet hour in the company of her Sisters would have been more to her taste than this "slow martyrdom of the desk," and she frankly admitted the fact. "But I have to atone in this way," she added pleasantly, "for the many

hours I have wasted in the world.” “No more post,” was included in her playful enumeration of the minor delights of Paradise.

Sister Mary of St. Francis paid in all ten visits to her native land after she had donned the livery of Notre Dame. Nine times she went as the companion of the Superior-General, and once as her delegate. We have already dealt with the first of these journeys, when she was yet a novice in 1852. In this chapter we intend utilizing her other visits to our shores during the next fifteen years, as convenient standpoints whence we may rapidly review the English development of Notre Dame.

Mère Constantine and Sister Mary of St. Francis landed in England for the second time in the summer of 1854. After a pleasant and busy week at Clapham, they passed on to Northampton and Lancashire. Seven houses had to be visited in the County Palatine, for that of Wigan had been opened in Holy Week. Everywhere they found fervent communities, with good work in the schools already achieved, and giving promise of future development.

Clapham, the first and last item on the programme, was in some respects the most consoling. True, it could not show such great numbers of children as rejoiced the visitors in the Northern hives of industry, but, under Sister Marie Thérésia's vigorous and resourceful government, the community maintained the fervour of its struggling beginnings, and a healthy emulation animated the pupils, whose studies were now skilfully planned and directed. The establishment enjoyed the confidence and esteem of Catholics. Dr. Grant, the saintly Bishop of Southwark, took a keen interest in the school, and for years he came regularly once a fortnight to give the elder girls a

course of instruction in Christian doctrine. On one occasion, hearing that the Redemptorist Father about to commence a retreat with these young ladies had been ordered off to Ireland at a moment's notice, he came to the convent to volunteer his services instead. As he was leaving the parlour, he slipped this note into the Superior's hand:

"Do not be afraid, through over-respect, to refuse my offer if it does not appear quite suitable."

Episcopal visitations of convents were not then customary in England, but until his death Dr. Grant came at least four times a year to Clapham to hear the Sisters' confessions and to chat with the assembled community in a fatherly and most interesting manner.

His visit on the 8th of December, 1859, is especially noteworthy. He granted forty days' Indulgence to the members of Our Lady's Sodality, established in the boarding-school, each time they added E.D.M. to their signature, provided, of course, that the document thus signed contained nothing unworthy of a child of Mary. He also made the Superior promise to keep a lamp alight before the statue of Our Lady in the convent chapel, and spoke so impressively of the favours obtained through this practice that the boarders agreed to provide the oil.

The zealous Bishop urged Mère Constantine, when he met her in 1854, to found a convent near his own Cathedral, and so in the following year a second London house was opened at 118, St. George's Road. It began in great poverty—there were few paying pupils—but the elementary schools attached to the Cathedral were from the first a fruitful source of consolation.

The Sisters also had charge of two other schools (Maypole Alley and Guildford Street), which had been made over by the Bishop for maintenance and manage-



ment to Canon Wenham, a man well versed in educational matters, and able through his influential friends to secure the necessary funds. Canon Wenham had charge of Mortlake parish and cemetery, yet for eight years he never failed to visit both schools twice a week. He has been known to decline dining with a Duchess on the plea that he had to hear the confessions of these little ones.

Dr. Grant appointed himself confessor-in-ordinary to the Sisters, and, when at home, said Mass for them on weekdays. On Sundays, when they went out to Mass, he never failed, despite their repeated protests, to rise at five o'clock, in order to give them Holy Communion in their own little chapel.

St. George's Convent is next door but one to the stately Cathedral, where Mr. Petre lies buried, and the correspondence entailed by this foundation and its development must often have recalled to Sister Mary of St. Francis memories of bygone beneficence in connection with that prince of beggars, Dr. Doyle. Other associations were renewed by the second foundation of 1855, this time in Yorkshire, the scene of her early married happiness. In June, 1854, Bishop Briggs had written to her from York with the freedom of an old friend:

"I am very anxious to see some communities of your Order planted in Yorkshire. We have a very fine opening for you in Sheffield—good schools, plenty of children (some of the middle class), and a very grand church. I might mention Bradford, Hull, etc., where nuns are very much wanted."

Our convent at Sheffield—the immediate outcome of this letter—was opened under difficulties. Canon Scully, who invited the Sisters, left the mission on account of failing health before their arrival, and though his successor, Canon Fisher, was ready to befriend them, he had little more to offer than his good-will.



Sister Mary of St. Francis enjoyed very much the story of the journey from Liverpool. One of the pioneers, Sister Ursula, set out with the intention of carrying all the way a good-sized statue of Our Lady ; and she persevered in her determination, despite the five minutes for change of train at Manchester and the steep climb up and down embankments among the Pennines, when repairs in a tunnel gave occasion to a five-mile omnibus drive in the pelting rain. These thrilling details, and other droll adventures which befell the little band, lost nothing in the telling when one of the number, Sister Mary of St. Michael, wrote an account of the journey to her sister, then a novice at Namur.

Sister Mary of St. Francis had early noted the brilliant promise in this gifted pair of sisters, and she utilized their talents so judiciously in her schemes for the glory of God that a slight digression on their account does not come amiss in her own biography.

At the time when the Petres' home in Wilton Crescent was a centre of charitable activities, Frances and Annie Lescher were blooming into womanhood, and as enthusiastic as any Catholic girl of the day over the politics and devotions of the Second Spring. They were left motherless when Frances was fourteen, and henceforth she became the intellectual companion of her father, and " guide, philosopher, and friend," to her younger brothers and sisters. Annie, the next in age, was a beautiful, spirited girl, a great favourite in the family circle, and her sister's helpmate in every zealous enterprise. Out of their pocket-money they paid a woman to keep the chapel near their home open on weekdays, so that they and their fellow-parishioners might at any hour visit Jesus in the Tabernacle; and on Sundays they took turns at the harmonium in the choir, a crazy instrument, given to fits of dumbness,

and only to be coaxed back to harmony by "a kick, and a shake, and a shove," from the officiating priest. Perhaps Blessed Julie earmarked them for her daughters, as from her throne in heaven she looked down upon their persevering assiduity with the class of ragamuffins whom they instructed unto justice in the Catholic atmosphere of a disused coach-house attached to their home.

Both girls wanted to be nuns, but while Frances realized that her duty lay at home until Agnes, the youngest and cleverest of her sisters, was of age to replace her with her father, Annie's difficulty was not *when*, but *where*. Few of the priests whom she consulted could be brought to believe in the reality of her aspirations. Dr. Gentili's advice was crudely blunt: "If there is any young man who is wishful to marry you, take him."

Father Knox of the Oratory, her usual confessor, believed at least that she was in earnest; but he owned he had no light for her case, and advised her to consult Father de Buggenoms.

"And he sends everybody to Notre Dame," sighed Annie, who was by no means favourably impressed with the little she knew about our Institute, and regarded the convent at Clapham as a select boarding-school where special attention was paid to the deportment of the pupils. So in her interview with Father de Buggenoms she began by saying she wanted to be a Carmelite, and was rather taken aback when he looked up sweetly and offered to write to the Prioress at Lanherne and arrange for her admission as a postulant.

"Your sister has *no* vocation to a contemplative life, but it will be a *leetle t'reep*," he explained in private to the indignant Frances.

Somehow, the little trip was taken to Namur, just

as Sister Mary of St. Francis had assumed the white veil, and when Annie read our Rules and saw our Poor Schools at work she was eager to remain. As Sister Mary of St. Michael she had a short career, but a happy one, among the slum children of Southwark and Sheffield. Yet she owned on her death-bed, eight years after her profession: "The time I look back upon with most comfort now is the short period I was employed, sorely against the grain, in a boarding-school."

Sister Mary of St. Michael was already professed before home circumstances allowed her elder sister to enter at Namur. The weary wait had been utilized by Frances to broaden her views on education and to deepen her knowledge of its working details. She numbered among her intimates such men as Mr. Allies, Secretary of the Catholic Poor School Committee, and Mr. Nasmyth Stokes, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors for the schools connected with that body. Both these friends of hers foresaw that at no very distant date a teaching certificate would be a *sine qua non* in all grant-aided schools. The boys' department gave little anxiety on that score, as each year Hammersmith sent out a batch of qualified masters; but the nuns, who were dealing efficiently with the infants and girls, showed great reluctance to face the ordeal of examination in order to obtain their diploma. Every year a training college for Catholic schoolmistresses became a matter of more imperative necessity. Mr. Stokes saw in Frances Lescher just the woman to whom the presidency of such a college could be safely entrusted if, as he put it, "the piety of any person—would it be fair to say of any lady?—were to devote five thousand pounds in this way for the benefit of the poor of her own sex."

He by no means lost heart when Miss Lescher entered Religion, for in his official capacity he had

watched the Notre Dame nuns at work, and had enjoyed ample opportunity to test the soundness of their methods. Besides, was not Mrs. Petre a member of that Order, and identified with its interests? He had seen enough of Mrs. Petre in her husband's lifetime to justify full confidence in her large-heartedness and level-headedness; and if he did form an exaggerated estimate of the funds at her disposal, he could depend upon it she would never give a promise exceeding her power to fulfil.

And so, early in 1855, Mr. Allies was formally deputed by the Catholic Poor School Committee to lay before the Namur authorities a proposal to begin a training college for Catholic schoolmistresses. He was empowered to offer a hundred pounds towards equipment at the start, and an annual grant of one hundred and twenty-five pounds for each Sister on the teaching staff, and of two pounds towards the expenses of each student in training. No help from Government towards the upkeep of the establishment would be available until success had justified the initial endeavour.

The Sisters of Notre Dame were asked to take all risks and supply premises and competent mistresses. Mère Constantine rose to the occasion.

"The conditions are hard," she decided, "but we cannot forsake the poor children."

She knew she could count on Sister Mary of St. Francis, and the boarding-school at Mount Pleasant was ready as a nucleus for the college buildings. As to examinations, it was wisely considered that Her Majesty's Inspector's estimate of the abilities of the Sisters carried more weight than their own poor opinion of themselves.

So, in October, 1855, the recently professed Sister Mary of St. Philip received her obedience for Mount

Pleasant, where she was soon joined by Sister Mary of St. Michael and ten other Sisters, for two months of hard study. Mr. Stokes gave them what help he could in the shape of suggestions as to the choice of text-books, but they had very little idea of what they would be expected to know till the 11th of December, when thirty candidates (ten nuns beside our own, and eight seculars) sat down to write the first batch of examination papers ever forwarded to Whitehall from the training schools of Notre Dame.

The following week thirty girls secured passes as Queen's Scholars. Nine of these went in January to a college opened by the Sisters of Mercy at Nottingham, and transferred two months later to the Convent of the Holy Child at St. Leonards-on-Sea. The remaining twenty-one, with a convert lady who afterwards joined our Order, formed the appreciative audience to whom Sister Mary of St. Philip addressed her inaugural lecture on "Our Lady Queen of Apostles."

A new building was at once begun, to accommodate sixty students, and it rose so rapidly that the December examinations were held within its walls. When, in 1857, Mère Constantine and Sister Mary of St. Francis paid their third visit to England, it was decided to convert the middle-grade classes attached to the convent into a practising school under Government inspection. In addition to this, the Liverpool students enjoyed, from the first, access for teaching purposes to three or four large schools conducted by our Sisters within a mile's radius from Mount Pleasant.

Fain would we linger over the plucky struggle for existence made by the Training School in its early years. When the pioneer band of students passed out of college at the end of their second year's residence, Mr. Marshall, the London Inspector, wrote to congratulate the heads



of the establishment on the success achieved, "a success unparalleled in the history of training schools." More gratifying to the mistresses who had prepared these girls, more gratifying especially to the English heart at Namur who had organized, financed, encouraged, and advised, were the high encomiums wrung from the hard-headed ecclesiastical examiners in the previous October by the level of proficiency reached in the Scripture and doctrine papers of all the students, and in the lessons delivered in their presence by those of the second year.

"All undertakings are worthless, unless hall-marked with the Cross," is a famous saying of Blessed Julie. These early laurels of 1859 were well watered by the tears of the inmates of Mount Pleasant as they knelt in February round the bier of their Superior, Sister Jeanne de Jésus. On the following Holy Saturday the Clapham community received word from Namur to blend a *Fiat* with their Alleluias, and Sister Marie Thérésia prepared to start for Liverpool to begin her long career of usefulness in the North.

There are many graceful allusions in the Whitehall Blue-Books to the work done by Sister Marie Thérésia and Sister Mary of St. Philip. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors, speaking with official cognizance of the results achieved by the twelve hundred and seventy-five students trained within its precincts during the first thirty years of its existence, calls Mount Pleasant "a beautiful record of philanthropy and piety." And Mr. Stokes wrote to a niece of his, three days after the death of Sister Mary of St. Francis (June 27th, 1886):

"Indeed, I had the best cause to know what invaluable aid the departed Sister bestowed on our Catholic education. She may be said to have made it, for without her means, and her wisdom, and her





MOUNT PLEASANT

Memorial Chapel of Sister Mary of St. Francis



authority, and her courage, your excellent Sisters might not have seen their way to undertake the novel and weighty work of a training college, and to carry it on with a sustained sagacity and munificence which placed it, and always kept it, at the head of all such institutions; and, while doing precisely what prudent leaders of public opinion wish to see done, have enabled our Catholic-trained schoolmistresses everywhere to gain a foremost position for their schools, and to win golden opinions for themselves and their religion, while spreading sound instruction and good conduct among the pupils!"

Another Inspector wrote on the same mournful occasion:

"Mount Pleasant alone is enough for a perpetual memorial of the intelligent devotion of Mrs. Petre, whose singular wisdom and boundless generosity has conferred so many benefits on Catholic education in England and upon numberless individuals of the better sex."

The Training College was still in its infancy when Mère Constantine came to it in 1857. As the summer holidays in the North of England were at that period about a month earlier than in the South, she was able then and in subsequent visitations so to time her stay at Mount Pleasant and at Clapham as to coincide with the annual retreat to which Sisters from the other houses were always invited. During this eight days' quiet interval she saw each Sister at her leisure, spoke every day to the assembled communities, and arranged with the Superiors the changes of office deemed expedient.

Meanwhile, Sister Mary of St. Francis did not find the time heavy on her hands. There were structural alterations in buildings, class equipment, and organization of studies to be arranged for, lengthy interviews

in the parlour with ecclesiastics and business men, and interviews of a more homely and affectionate nature, in the room allotted for her use, with the different members of each community. It was then that her royal memory came into play as to details touching their health, personal difficulties, and family vicissitudes.

“God has given me the grace,” she said, “to remember each Sister and everything connected with her family which she has once made known to me.”

In 1860, seven communities sent their contingent to the Liverpool retreat, for there was a convent at St. Helens since 1858. This foundation was due, in the first instance, to the persevering energy of the Rev. Father Ullathorne, S.J.

During his noviceship in the Collège de la Paix, at Namur, this zealous Jesuit used to take his turn to serve the 5.30 Mass at our Mother-House, and even then he made a mental note to get Sisters of Notre Dame for his schools if he were ever in charge of an English mission. After five years' importunity, he had at last the satisfaction of welcoming six Sisters at the railway-station of St. Helens, and of escorting them to the house he had in readiness, while his jubilant parishioners lined the route, presenting flowers and future pupils.

The house prepared for the Sisters was in many ways inconvenient as a convent, and it had only a yard a few feet square for garden; but everything was scrupulously neat and clean. So thoroughly had the Sisters' needs been catered for, that to Father Ullathorne's anxious inquiry, “Have you all you want?” the Superior could answer with perfect truth on the very evening of their arrival:

“Yes, Father, thank you, except the greatest of all wants—our dear Lord in the Tabernacle.”

The very next morning the Divine Master came to make His abode in the temporary chapel, an ugly uncarpeted room with whitewashed walls, and such shabby furniture and tawdry adornment as brought tears of gratitude and loving devotion to the eyes of His faithful spouses, and made them select the stable at Bethlehem for the subject of their meditation on the morning of that first Mass.

On the 10th of October the community moved into a larger house, with a good-sized garden, facing the Jesuit church at Lowe House. But their sphere of usefulness was by no means restricted to one parish. As the Sisters passed to and from one or another of the eight schools attended from the convent, a few little boys at first sang at them, "I won't be a nun!" But in general they were treated with marked deference and respect by the townsfolk, irrespective of creed. "Such good people!" Sister Mary of St. Francis said at each of her visits, and she pointed out how careful the men were to remove pipe from mouth and hat from head at sight of the habit of Notre Dame.

For many years this community was governed by Sister Mary Anne, a German lady who had been a fellow-novice of Sister Mary of St. Francis, and whose saintliness drew from Father Dignam, S.J., the following lines, in a letter written after her death in 1891:

"No nun I ever knew was so purely the creature of her Institute, and no one who knew her and it will ever doubt that her life was its panegyric. . . . If there was an excess about her (and I do not think there was), it was her love of her community; and when I talk of her as 'resting' in heaven, I expect it will only be in the comparative degree while one of you is still ungathered."

Of the community ruled by this holy religious Father Dignam again remarked:



“ I have seen, as Père Petit once wrote of a convent, that my Jesus is well loved there.”

Another foundation was begun in the 1860 visit, in a town differing in every respect from St. Helens. After the Clapham retreat in July, Mère Constantine sent Sister Maria Teresa and three Sisters to begin a house in the naval port of Plymouth. Both Ma Mère and Sister Mary of St. Francis were much distressed when they realized the inconvenient and unhealthy situation of the first convent in Stonehouse, and on their first visit to Plymouth, in 1863, a building plot was purchased on a site adjoining the Cathedral. Until it was ready for occupancy, the Sisters moved to Westbury Terrace, where they were able to accommodate a few boarders. On the morrow of their arrival Sister Mary of St. Francis wrote:

“ I was so happy last night to think that you and your dear Sisters are breathing purer air.”

Dr. Vaughan, the genial Bishop—“ William the Builder,” he loved to sign himself in informal notes to the Sister Superior—showed a keen and practical interest in the rising convent. He himself planned a latticed window in the infirmary adjoining the chapel, so that invalids might see the Tabernacle and join in the prayers. When, in 1865, the Sisters moved into their new abode, they found His Lordship on the premises, hammer in hand, hanging the pictures, and superintending the unpacking of the furniture with such method and vigour that all was in order in a day.

Fain would memory digress to many another instance of his fatherly care and solicitude.

“ Reverend Mother saves *me* the trouble of a visitation,” he used to say with a smile, adding once, when Mère Aimée did not stay as long as he wished in Ply-



mouth: "I wanted time to ask her for a few hints how to get through the business quickly."

But his frequent fatherly visits to the community were counted by the Sisters among their pleasantest recreations. Every privilege in his power to grant was readily conceded. When Christmas came round, he himself said Midnight Mass in the convent chapel as long as health permitted; and when age and failing strength hindered his coming, he took care to send a priest in his place, so that the Sisters might not be deprived of a favour which they so highly appreciated.

In 1860, as in 1845, the Cornish peninsula was a stronghold of Dissent. Plymouth, in particular, was noted for its multiplicity of creeds, and was not exempt from sectarian ignorance. When the Sisters first admitted the public to view their Crib, the group of figures was variously commented on as "waxworks" and "Moses in the bulrushes." The non-Catholics among our pupils soon were conspicuous in their own Sunday-schools for their accurate knowledge and graphic grasp of the events recorded in Holy Scripture.

"Please, Sister," said a little Nonconformist, "will you lend me your Crucifix to show in Sunday-school? Our teacher thinks Our Blessed Lord was just tied to the branches of a tree!"

A great hardship to the Plymouth community was its isolated position, away from the other houses—so far away, indeed, that it had to be struck off the visitation list in 1867; for the advancing age of the Reverend Mother, and the increasing infirmities of her assistant, made travelling more and more onerous as the years went on. In 1867, when they were several days weather-bound at Calais, Madame Dréville came to them from Amiens, and saw to it that they had every

comfort at the hotel. She was much distressed to find "Laura" looking so poorly; and Lady Malet, who visited her old friend at Clapham, was equally shocked at her altered appearance.

"It grieved me inexpressibly," she writes, "to find her sallow and depressed, unlike herself, and I felt indignant at the neglect there seemed to be somewhere. She required more movement, a more active life, if they meant her to keep well."

In point of fact, the ill-health was really due to over-exertion. The cholera epidemic of the preceding summer had been too great an anxiety and strain on her physical powers. Every care was being taken of her; and in that very visitation the head cook of the Mother-House was of the party, to pick up ideas in cookery for the benefit of Sister Mary of St. Francis and the English novices and schoolgirls at Namur, as well as to insure uniformity of diet throughout the trip for the Superior-General.

For Mère Constantine, too, was in failing health, and this was destined to be her very last journey to England. Responsibility on her account was added to her companion's other anxieties, and it was a positive relief to everyone when, on the 10th of August, they re-embarked for Belgium. This was the day on which Sisters from eleven communities came out of retreat at Clapham, but Ma Mère felt unfit for any formal leave-taking.

"I bless and embrace you all in the Sacred Heart of Jesus," she said to her assembled daughters. "Love well our good God!"

This was her last exhortation on English soil.

Ten days previously her name-day had been celebrated at Clapham in the homely Notre Dame style. The gifts usual on such occasions were this time of an

amusingly heterogeneous nature, ranging from a chalice to a soup-ladle. The English Superiors had arranged among themselves to enable her to supply, in this way, whatever was still lacking in the household plenishing of the convent recently opened at Camberwell. Sister Mary of St. Francis was in the secret, and added to the collection a ciborium which she had leave to buy for the new house. Any present of her choosing was usually connected with the service of the Blessed Sacrament.

Immediately after this family festival the Sisters began a retreat, during which each of those engaged in teaching was invited to state in writing her ideas on "how to better actual conditions and get more docility from the children."

On the third afternoon of the Spiritual Exercises, Sister Mary of St. Francis packed a picnic basket, and set out for Camberwell with the Superior of Plymouth, an old noviciate companion of hers. Two young Sisters professed in the previous April had been left in charge during the retreat, and their visitors surprised them in the midst of house-cleaning.

One of the youthful hostesses showed Sister Maria Teresa round the house, while the other went to the kitchen, on hospitable thoughts intent. Sister Mary of St. Francis quickly followed with tucked-up sleeves.

"My dear, do you suppose I have never cut bread-and-butter or made tea? Let me see! One spoonful for each of us, and one for the teapot!"

It was a merry meal that followed. So much noviciate news to be asked for and given, and the mirth-provoking exploits of the inexperienced young house-keepers to be narrated and enjoyed, All too soon came the good-byes and Sister Mary of St. Francis's parting injunction:

“ My dears, you have eaten hardly anything. Go back and take a proper tea.”

Another pleasing episode of the 1867 visit was a trip to Norwich—still, as in the days of Fuller, “ a garden in a city, or a city in a garden.” The Sisters of Notre Dame had been settled here since 1864 in a mansion standing in its own grounds on St. Catherine’s Hill. Lord Stafford was delighted to have his sister’s Sisters for such near neighbours, and on the very day of their arrival sent them a giant pasty, measuring ten inches in depth and forty in circumference, which was carried by two men all the way from Costessey. It contained game of different kinds; and the crust, it is said, served to thicken the community soup during the next three months.

Lord and Lady Stafford always took a kindly interest in the doings at St. Catherine’s Hill. Every year the mistresses and children went to Costessey for the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, which Lady Stafford organized in the grounds with so much taste and skill.

It was an immense joy to Sister Mary of St. Francis to revisit Costessey in the company of her beloved Mère Constantine. How eagerly during the four-mile drive she pointed out the historic buildings of the quaint old city so full of Catholic memories, and the familiar beauties of the East Anglian landscape. A prolonged halt had to be made at the park gates, for the lodge-keeper, Mrs. Harte, was recognized as an old acquaintance. Many another old friend was affectionately greeted that day, and the grandchildren of her early playmates among the villagers were brought to her for a caress. Then the oldest playmate of them all had to be introduced to her companion, the octogenarian gardener who had often given her in babyhood a ride on his shoulder.



PROCESSION IN COSTESSEY PARK

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## CHAPTER XX

### SAINTE GENEVIÈVE AND SAINT IGNACE

“ By haughty word, cold force of mind,  
We seek not hearts to rule.  
Hearts win the hearts they seek : behold  
The secret of our school.”

FABER.

WHEN Mère Constantine visited Costessey Hall, and viewed its gilded ceilings and carved oak panelling, the soft carpets and art treasures in its galleries, and the couches and roomy fireplaces in its many-mirrored apartments, her thoughts must have reverted to Sainte Geneviève, the plainly furnished room at Namur where Sister Mary of St. Francis spent so much of her time, and which has since become for many a Sister of Notre Dame one of those hallowed spots on which memory loves to linger.

A long, low room was Sainte Geneviève, receiving air and light from two windows, and heated in the winter by a stove of modest dimensions. It contained but little furniture: an iron bedstead with linen curtains in blue-and-white check, a cupboard for her papers, a deal writing-table painted black, with a fairly comfortable arm-chair in front of it, and one or two other chairs, rush-bottomed or caned, for the use of her visitors. There was no carpet, of course, and the floor was not even waxed. Once she called in some

novices to admire a neat little footrug, which one of the professed Sisters had knitted for her out of scraps of cloth.

"Look," she said, "how grand they are making me! It is far too good to be here."

The unpapered walls had for adornment a Crucifix, a picture of St. Francis, and, facing the bed, a statue of Our Lady, before which she was careful to keep a lamp lit whenever any Sisters were at sea.

"It reminds me," she said, "to think of them when I wake in the night, and to say the *Ave Maris Stella*."

Her joy and gratitude were duly expressed whenever, at Christmastide, a few sprigs of berried holly brightened the apartment, in accordance with English tradition; and she made a point of finding out who had put them there, so as to thank her in person.

But, indeed, what little kindness ever shown to her was allowed to go unthanked? Some Sisters noticed that whenever Sister Mary of St. Anthony came in to mend her fire or render any other trifling service, she never failed to interrupt her work or conversation to smile or say a little word in acknowledgment. Others (including the present writer) never noticed anything of the sort; the omission of the act of courtesy would have startled as incongruous.

The serene balance of her virtues was a very remarkable feature in Sister Mary of St. Francis's character. "Don't aim too high, or at only one thing; with us it is the golden mean," was her good-humoured damper to youthful enthusiasm. Her own practice seemed to tally with this advice, though it is absurd to attribute aught but very high aims to her. Gratitude for trifles was, we have said, of a piece with the rest of her conduct; but it is not easy to determine how far it was the expression of her benevolence

(innate, we would call it, if virtuous inclinations could be innate) or her delicate appreciation for the details of Holy Poverty.

Her bare little room was always scrupulously neat, and great was her ingenuity to avoid waste or extravagance. Even the backs of envelopes were utilized for rough notes ; and when she happened to spoil a sheet of notepaper, she was careful to ask a penance for her carelessness. Once when she was visiting at Clapham, the local Superior wished to replace sundry articles of her darned and patched underwear, but was prevented by Sister Mary of St. Anthony. " Sister Mary of St. Francis liked old things, and would never allow it."

This care of the things allotted for her use stood out in striking contrast with the princely liberality she could show when occasion demanded. There was nothing narrow in her religious economy. In the employment of funds for educational purposes in England nothing was ever undertaken without the most cordial deference to the wishes of her Superiors. But her dependence on them, as to the use and disposal of the smallest objects, was a far more convincing tribute to her esteem and love for " My Lady Poverty." She said to a young religious :

" We should never think that we are troublesome to our Superiors by asking too many permissions."

Sometimes she gave a little picture to a Sister starting on an English mission, or some such trifle as a pencil and eraser, " to write virtues and rub out faults." But she always took care to mention that she had Ma Mère's leave for the gift. If she forgot to give the picture in the hurry and emotion of farewell, it was invariably posted, with a kind word on the back, to the house where the Sister was stationed.

Trifles these, but of the class of trifles which Michael Angelo warns us we cannot afford to disregard, as they constitute perfection "in itself no trifle."

"He thinks triflingly of God  
Who trifles dares refuse,"

writes Father Bridgett, in his *Lyra Hieratica*, and Sister Mary of St. Francis was at one with him there. "We should ask Almighty God to take what we have not courage to give," was a favourite saying of hers. Trifles at any rate were not to impede her progress in her journey heavenwards, nor to hinder her from following closely in the footprints of the Incarnate Word. She once said to some postulants about to take the habit :

"You will have many things to bear in religion which may seem hard; but it will help you to suffer patiently if you try to recall the words of Our Lord, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air their nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' You will never have to go through as much as Our Divine Lord had to bear."

Traits of this nature edified her Sisters in religion, while outsiders, who had known her in the world, wasted their commiseration on the heaviness and coarse texture of the "habit of her Order." An amusing anecdote is current of a Protestant lady, who visited her at Namur and condoled with her in minute detail on the various discomforts apparent in her costume. Sister Mary of St. Francis laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks, and to remove these traces of emotion she produced her pocket-handkerchief—three-quarters of a yard of lilac check! This was the last straw, and the horrified visitor hardly waited to say good-bye.

King Leopold I. enjoyed his visits more, and stayed longer. "I am perfectly happy," she told His Majesty, "and my days are well filled in the service of God and of my neighbour."

Days well filled indeed! while the accumulating aroma of minute fidelity, unperceived by men, mounted in delicious fragrance to the throne of God.

"There was nothing narrow about Sister Mary of St. Francis," writes a former pupil of Namur. "She was the most large-hearted and broad-minded woman I have ever had the good-fortune to meet. Her holiness—and it was real holiness—developed in the strong sunshine of God's approving smile; for she had given Him a free hand in her soul, and He could use her in big things and in little, just as it was pleasing to His Divine Majesty. She has always reminded me of an unobtrusive, velvety heart's-ease, that hardy, lowly plant, gay and never drooping, in harmony with our every mood, sad or joyful, and providing the bees with wax for God's altars and honey for His creatures.

"Her work was chiefly within the whitewashed walls of a plainly furnished room: correspondence, or familiar interviews with the Sisters or English pupils. The rest of the establishment knew little about her, though the annual visits of 'Milor Stafford' invested his sister with a certain glamour in the eyes of the citizens of Namur. I was often asked if I did not feel *guindée* in presence of a lady of such grand family. 'But we do not talk of *her* family,' I used to answer, 'we talk of *mine*, of baths, and food, and flannel, and such-like interesting items.'

"'It is an infirmity of the mind,' she more than once remarked to me, 'not to be able to ascend to high things; but it is also an infirmity not to be able to come down to the ordinary details of life.' She could do both.



“Once—she was Superior then—I was in great trouble, for the morning’s post had brought news of my father’s death. She took pains to elevate my soul to the height of the sacrifice God was asking from me, and put before me lofty and beautiful ideas, clothed in simple and persuasive language. She went with me to the chapel and prayed with me there. Then, as I shrank from facing any eye but hers, she let me spend the rest of the morning in her room. I sat in a corner with writing materials in front of me, while she bent over her black writing-table, reading and answering letters. Ever and anon she turned to me with a look of sympathy, but never a word. She felt, and I felt, that silence was the truest kindness.

“Every detail of that morning remains graven on my memory, especially the rasping whirr of the knife factory next door, which in livelier times punctuated rather pleasantly than otherwise our chats in Sainte Geneviève; and I wondered dully if the incessant noise of the machinery never jarred upon her nerves in health, and how she stood it when she was ill.

“Sometimes a knock came to the door, and one Sister or another entered with some detail requiring attention. It was a marvel to me with what ease she could turn from her work to deal cheerfully with theirs. The cook, I remember, had a lengthy interview. There was the morrow’s dinner to discuss, and the items cooking downstairs to report on. Dear Sister Superior’s practical grasp of minutiae struck me at the time, but I can only recall one sentence with the quick deprecating gesture which accompanied it, ‘Oh, no, no. The children had *that* yesterday and twice last week.’ ”

There were sometimes as many as five-and-twenty English pupils at Namur, and with each Sister Mary of St. Francis managed to contrive leisure for a private



interview, more or less frequently, as circumstances or individuals required. No detail of their health or conduct escaped her motherly attention; and they could talk to her fully of their ups and downs, the joys, successes, and slender sorrows of schoolgirl life, their home circumstances, and future prospects. Often, too, did an arch smile or humorous allusion show that she was well informed as to their freaks and peculiar difficulties.

"I don't like scolding," she often protested when, as it sometimes happened, she had to reprimand. "She encouraged every atom of good that was in me," writes one. "She had a wonderful knack of making hard things seem easy," notes another. And usually the interview ended with a picture, some sweets, or one of the fancy knick-knacks dear to the heart of the average schoolgirl.

Their Christmas party with her was an event in the year: English dainties, a Christmas-tree, or some equivalent surprise, and such a flow of mirth and laughter as might be expected from children enjoying themselves in the company of a beloved mother. And a mother she was to each one of them, a safe friend, a large-hearted confidant.

Some, of course, had "orphaned rights" to her indulgence, and of these she used to remark, "Poor dear children! They have no one to pet them. I really must be allowed to spoil them a little."

"I think Sister Mary of St. Francis had a specially motherly love for us motherless little ones," writes a Highland lady. "My first vivid impression of her is just after our good father had bidden us farewell. Her bonnet was awry, for my little six-year-old sister was on her knee, with both arms tight round her neck, crying over her guimpe and crumpling it. To my

childish mind such behaviour was little short of sacrilege, but the dear, kind Sister did not seem to mind one bit. She must have consoled us that day (as she did many a time afterwards) with a packet of barley-sugar. She always brought out a supply of that wholesome sweetmeat when she sent for us on Sundays."

Sometimes parents, living in remote country districts, or wishing to finish their daughter's education by calling for her at Namur for a Continental trip, expressed a desire that three or four good dresses should be ordered and made according to the style then worn. Sister Mary of St. Francis encouraged the girls to choose for themselves, largely helped by her taste and sympathetic interest. When the costumes came from the dressmaker's hands, they had to be tried on in Sainte Geneviève for her personal inspection.

"Be sure you tell your mother those two gowns were my choice," she said on one occasion when the result was especially becoming.

Another girl recalls her evident annoyance when, in the case of a mourning order executed in a hurry, there was no English crape available in the town.

The term "Mother" applies with equal accuracy to Sister Mary of St. Francis as regards the English novices and postulants. With these she always kept in touch, although in 1868, as already mentioned, she was relieved of her duties as Mère St. François. Her successor, Mère Blandine, was prudent, holy, and kind-hearted; but she adopted to those under her an attitude at times suggestive of that Master of Novices concerning whom his subordinates irreverently remarked:

"The worst of it is he is heaping up for himself an eternal weight of glory in the next world by making our lives a misery in this."

Her idea was to harden young religious against the trials which might befall them in after-years. Hence caustic alertness to minute defects and unfailing blindness to successful endeavour. She trained her novices thoroughly—they all realized it with gratitude in later life—and her plan worked well in the main with the Belgians and Americans in her care. Certain thin-skinned Britishers, however, required time and a few glimpses into her real self in order to appreciate her motives and methods; and with these it was sometimes just as well that their former mistress was at hand to coax them back into sweet reasonableness.

One irrepressible had been in the wars all the morning. She had been working vigorously in different parts of the house, but whenever she forgot herself for just one little moment she would turn round to find Mère Blandine's eyes fixed on her in sadly inquiring gaze, or she heard, without turning, her dry, discreet little cough. At last she found her way to Sainte Geneviève and there recounted the series of mishaps. In the midst of her tale came a knock at the door. Sister Mary of St. Francis shook with laughter.

"It's Mère Blandine catching you again," she whispered. And sure enough it was the hour when the Mistress of Novices usually called in to fetch the letters for the post.

Another time it is Mère Constantine, who crept softly in to Sainte Geneviève when her assistant had one of her *migraines*, only to find a white veil fluttering by the bedside.

"Ah, Ma Sœur Saint François," said she, shaking her finger, "so this is how you spoil the novices! Well, little one, I suppose I must not scold you if Sister Mary of St. Anthony shuts her eyes to your coming."

When the novices themselves were confined to bed,

their former mistress came to cheer them by her presence.

“Have you nothing to amuse you, my dear? No books?” she inquired, on her second condolence visit to one who had severely scalded her foot. The novice showed her a book of meditations and another for spiritual reading.

“You cannot pray all day,” she said gently. “I shall send you something.”

A little later her light footfall was heard on the staircase—even in old age the elasticity of her tread was remarkable—and there she was again with an armful of books, some of them delightful accounts of medieval churches, for she remembered she was catering for an architect’s daughter.

When war broke out between France and Germany in 1870, she sent for the same little Sister. “Dear child, how often do you write home? Once a month? Oh, that will never do! We are so near the seat of war that your dear people must be anxious. Write once a week as long as things are so disturbed.”

There are many little traits, too, in the reminiscences of the period, illustrating her affectionate solicitude when any of these cherished children were starting to try their prentice hand at the work of the Institute in her native country:

“It tears my heart out to send novices to England,” she remarked at a much later time.

“After all these years, Sister Superior?”

“Yes, it is always the same, because I know how much good it does them to remain their full time at Namur.”

But educational exigencies rendered this impossible, for in those days secular assistants were unheard of in the secondary schools of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

“How do you manage about dancing lessons?” a niece of Sister Mary of St. Francis once inquired.

“Oh, my dear,” came the quick repartee, “we are like the Tenth Hussars, we don’t dance.”

In the Mother-House at Namur the name “Saint Ignace” distinguishes the rooms set apart for those members of the Institute who are being trained to teach in the different grades of schools. Sister Mary of St. Francis was the real head of English Saint Ignace, and from her arm-chair in Sainte Geneviève she directed its course of studies. She often sent for the Sister who acted as her deputy, to discuss with her the details of the time-table, and marked for her selections from newspapers and magazines that the students might not be ignorant of current events or the trend of modern thought. Sometimes she chose subjects for essays, and carefully went through the resultant pile of papers, commenting on progress or evidence of special ability. Many were the questions submitted to her; and her notebooks and letters testify that she took pains to insure accuracy in the information she was called upon to impart. The orderly arrangement of her papers, the ease with which she found what was wanted, was a lesson in itself to these young people. Often, too, she spent an afternoon in Saint Ignace listening to the teaching, or taking the chair in an informal debate.

“Many times during my two years at Namur,” writes a novice of the period, “I remarked her great solicitude for all things concerning education. But the full significance of her action only became clear to me in my after-career as a class-mistress, when I had many evidences of her untiring interest and active support. I was surprised, in my last interview with her after my vows, to find how closely she had



followed me up in all my studies. So accurately indeed had she gauged my capabilities that my work was waiting for me at Liverpool, already mapped out. A year later I wrote to give her the results of two examinations, in one of which I had not been altogether successful. I received in kind reply a few treasured words, characteristic of that beautiful religious spirit which pervades all she said or wrote :

“ I have long wished to tell you that your little note gave me pleasure. All is ordained for the best. No doubt but that the little want of success at Christmas has been of use to you in many ways, and that, on the other hand, the contrary [*i.e.*, the success achieved] will have shown you still more clearly that while relying entirely on God, we must exert ourselves to the utmost, and do all in our power to insure success in a good cause. You must now be in full work. I hope that all will do well at the teaching examination, *you* included, as no doubt you will have to profess before the Inspectors. We shall pray for you all.”

It will be seen from the above that Sister Mary of St. Francis encouraged individual Sisters to cultivate their talents with a view to render service to the Congregation of which they were members. A Sister who showed promise of artistic ability relates how, for a few years after her profession, she was obliged to have some time set apart for practice each week, and to send twice a year tokens of her progress to Namur, where they were severely criticized by the Art mistress.

But only such branches were encouraged as would be practically useful in the immediate future. Thus, novices destined for America studied Latin in Saint Ignace, but others with a bent for languages had to direct their energies towards German and Italian. “ The day will come,” she foretold to one, “ when



Latin will be needed in our English schools, but you know as much as you will want of it just yet."

The same rule applied to reading. All books useful for reference were readily provided; but a Sister wishful for an occasional excursion into the realms of general literature was gently reminded: "We are poor women, and the poor cannot afford the means or the leisure for such books as you mention."

A taste for solid reading has a distinct value as a spiritual asset; and in her own case the cultivation of this taste may be said to have begun in her mother's boudoir, during the plastic years of childhood. Later she read extensively with her husband. The books may have been his selection, but the notes, extracted for private reference, show the trend of her intellect and partly explain the relish for her conversation found in such men as the writers for the *Edinburgh* and *Dublin Reviews*. Travels, memoirs, and natural science received their quota of attention; but her natural bent was philosophy, and if left to herself her range of reading would probably have been more restricted. She read with pleasure works dealing with metaphysics, provided they were not too technical, and her notebooks show that she was not satisfied until she had very clear notions on the subject of her study. It was just as well that the Providence of circumstances should have thus and then diverted her attention to the assimilation of other ideas, so rendering her better equipped to help others in that fruitful future for which she was unconsciously moulding her mind.

In Religion her Rule obliged her to spend a quarter of an hour every day, reading for her own spiritual profit; and in the interests of others she was obliged to devote a much larger portion of her time to points

connected with ascetic theology. For a series of years she explained the Catechism in English at Saint Ignace, and there is extant in her handwriting a lucid and succinct exposition of the chief truths of faith.

While preparing her lessons she was careful to consult approved writers and to submit her notes to competent ecclesiastics. Others might and did apply to her St. Augustine's eulogy on his mother, St. Monica: "A woman, yet in faith so manly! Hers was the serene enlightenment proper to the matured intellect of old age, and with it a mother's tenderness and the devout piety of a true Christian." She herself preferred to quote for the benefit of others, and humbly to apply in her own case the words of Monseigneur de Bethléem: "Le peu de connaissances qu'ont les femmes des principes et des précisions théologiques les rendent peu propres à juger des questions de controverse."

Loyalty to the Church, minute acquiescence in the decisions of her pastors, was innate in this daughter of the martyrs. As there is no *complete* version of the Holy Scriptures authorized in French, there are certain restrictions abroad with regard to reading it in the vulgar tongue. This is why, in French sermons and ascetical writings, the Latin words of the Vulgate are usually appended to each quotation in the vernacular. Although Sister Mary of St. Francis knew that it was perfectly right for her to use the Douay version, she nevertheless submitted the point to the convent chaplain, and obtained his express permission for herself and the novices in Saint Ignace.

"The Old Testament," she writes, "must not be read indiscriminately or without advice by young persons, as it contains many historic facts the reading of which it is better for them to avoid. . . . We are

not obliged to read law-books, but we are obliged to obey the law. In the same way we are obliged to know the truths which God has revealed, and we must obey His commands which are contained in the Bible; but it does not follow that every man is bound to read the Sacred Scriptures. It is the sense of these that we have to know: the reading of the letter is not essential. It is otherwise, of course, with the clergy. Magistrates, who have to administer justice, must study the law and make themselves familiar with its text and commentaries. In like manner spiritual pastors are bound to study continually the Rule of Faith contained in the Word of God, both written and unwritten."

## CHAPTER XXI

### IN THE DAYS OF THE 1870 CODE

“ Here and here hath England helped me,  
How can I help England now ? ”

BROWNING.

AMONG the volumes which Sister Mary of St. Francis made it a duty to study with close attention, we must not omit the series of publications issued periodically by the Education Department, Whitehall. So thoroughly did she master the contents of these “ Blue-Books ” that the Superior of Mount Pleasant jokingly told her:

“ One would take you for a schoolmistress with at least thirty years’ experience in a Government school.”

Thanks to her intelligent foresight, the altered conditions under the 1870 Code found Notre Dame very fairly equipped, both as to staffing and premises. Many of the Sisters held teaching diplomas, new schools could be opened in connection with existing convents, and three new foundations were begun: Everton Valley in 1869, Battersea and Islington in the summer of 1870.

The first of these was established to relieve Mount Pleasant of some of its distant day-pupils, and to meet additional applications from the clergy at the north end of Liverpool. A substantial stone house was bought, standing in its own grounds at the summit of a hilly road, miscalled “ The Valley.” Its windows

commanded at first an extensive view of the northern suburbs of Liverpool; but surrounding buildings have since encroached upon the landscape, and brought more little souls within the sphere of influence of the daughters of Blessed Julie. To-day Everton numbers more pupils in its elementary schools than any other of our English convents.

Sister Marie Thérésia superintended from Mount Pleasant the necessary alterations, and undertook to furnish the new house.

"I feel like a mother whose grown-up daughter is setting up for herself," she said, and she certainly spared no pains to provide handsomely for the comfort and convenience of the new community.

Mère Constantine, too, remembered the little scene at the opening of Camberwell, and she sent word that Everton might expect a present from Namur. Intense was the disappointment of the Superior when a neat little box arrived, via Mount Pleasant, and was found to contain a few remnants of black cloth, which would prove useful, it was explained to her, when the habits of the Sisters needed repairs. She allowed a few days to elapse before inviting her community to the unpacking of the box. They refused to believe their eyes.

"So unlike Ma Mère," whispered one.

"Just like Ma Mère," retorted another. "Depend upon it, something worth having is on the way."

"It is already here," said the Superior, displaying before their delighted gaze Mère Constantine's real present which had just arrived: two lace-trimmed albs, a handsome set of vestments, and the price of a cope.

Meanwhile another convent was in course of erection at Battersea, from designs by Mr. Buckler, son of the architect of Costessey Hall. Many of its features reminded Sister Mary of St. Francis of her old home;



but as a convent it proved more picturesque than convenient, a good deal being sacrificed to the frontage. The grandeur of its appearance, however, was a joy and a pride to the Catholics of the district—hard-working people for the most part, with but little, save religion, to brighten their lives. Their pastor, the Very Reverend Canon Drinkwater, was loud in his gratitude for the charity of the Institute “towards a parish, poor then and poor always, and never able to repay the expense.”

The other houses helped to furnish the new building, but some of the gifts for the chapel did not suit the Canon’s artistic ideas. He considered the Tabernacle old and old-fashioned.

“O my Sisters, I could never put Our Lord in that! Wait until you get something really good.”

And straightway Sister Mary of St. Francis, who rejoiced in each new foundation as another home for the Blessed Sacrament, obtained permission to order a more æsthetic Tabernacle from the firm of Hardman.

The Canon next objected to the Stations of the Cross.

“O my Sisters, I could never hang those up!”

The community managed as best they could with the indulgenced crucifixes on their rosaries till their good pastor went on his annual holiday, when his *locum tenens* made no difficulty about erecting the stations.

Canon Drinkwater was a man truly zealous for the beauty of God’s house. He let slip no opportunity to excite in his flock the Catholic spirit of love for the Liturgy. As soon as the Sisters were installed in his parish he made arrangements for a procession of the Blessed Sacrament in their grounds, to finish by Benediction in the church. This entailed crossing the public street, but the men parishioners lined up in living barricade to secure immunity from insult.



There they stood in their hundreds, awaiting, hat in hand and with heads reverently bowed, till the Blessed Sacrament passed between their ranks, when all fell spontaneously on their knees.

Sister Mary Isidore, the Superior, had a gift for music, and, much to the good Canon's delight, congregational singing soon became a speciality. Squalling babies somewhat marred its harmony at times, but he could not be induced to ask the mothers to leave at home "these infants who were but praising Our Lord in their own fashion," as he said. The school-children soon learnt the music of the Ratisbon Requiem, and then advantage was taken of every semi-double in November to have a solemn Mass for the dead.

One of these Masses was chanted each year for the deceased Sisters of Notre Dame. The Canon was a great admirer of our Institute, and anxious that his flock should share his own sentiments of affectionate gratitude. The Life of our Foundress furnished the theme for several of his Sunday evening discourses.

"You know, she is the Mother of our Sisters," he explained, "and it is right that I and my people should become well acquainted with her. So I take the book with me into the pulpit and talk it over. I show them what a person in a position like hers can be and has been, and the life her daughters are leading in our very midst. It comes home to them when I can point to the convent and say: 'There are the Notre Dame nuns whose Order Mère Julie founded! They are teaching your children to-day.'"

Dr. Grant died at Rome on the 10th of June, 1870. The very last letter he wrote was to bless the Battersea Community, and wish them welcome to their new abode. In him our Institute lost a staunch and valued friend.

But, after all, Bishop Vaughan and Dr. Grant, Mon-

signor Nugent and Canon Drinkwater, Father Ullathorne and Père de Buggenoms, what are they but types of the fatherly solicitude shown to the various foundations of Notre Dame by the Bishops of England and their clergy, both secular and regular ?

Another hard-working London priest, Canon Oakeley, took a journey to Liverpool in 1867, on purpose to ask Mère Constantine to open a convent in his mission at Islington. During the next three years he persistently reiterated his entreaties at Namur, to have some of those Sisters of Notre Dame whom he esteemed so highly "for the eminent services they have rendered to the Catholic Church in England, as well as for the sound Catholic education they give their children, rich and poor alike."

At length, in the summer of 1870, some Sisters arrived at the little house in Duncan Terrace, which was to be their abode. Sister Mary of St. Francis was especially interested in this foundation, by reason of her personal esteem for Canon Oakeley. Great poverty was anticipated, and the Superior received instructions to make no terms with their zealous pastor, but to accept whatever he could afford to offer towards their support, and Namur would make good the deficit until they were in a position to provide for themselves.

The first Mass in the convent was celebrated on the Feast of St. Luke, and Canon Oakeley addressed to his tiny congregation a few appropriate words. Like St. Luke, he reminded them, they had been chosen out of thousands to take God for their portion, to serve Him and to cause Him to be served by others. Like St. Luke, they were devout to Our Lady, and whereas he painted her portrait and handed it down to the Church, they were to trace her likeness on living hearts, who in their turn would hand it down to

posterity. And what would be their reward? Our Lord would reveal Himself to them with a new sweetness all His own, soothe their labours, compensate their sacrifices, gifting them with power, fortitude, and consolation.

In a month the Sodality of Our Lady numbered ninety young girls, and so fervently did these carry out their Rules that "Canon Oakeley's Children of Mary" were held up as models to the rest of Catholic London.

One of the most interesting of the good works entrusted to the Sisters was the religious instruction of adults, for the Canon was the human instrument in many wonderful conversions wherein it was easy to trace the "Finger of God's Right Hand." These neophytes seemed to have an unusually docile and childlike spirit, believing implicitly all they were told, and ready to make the greatest sacrifices for the Faith they had embraced.

The holiness of Canon Oakeley himself, his great spirit of faith, his devotion to Our Blessed Lord, his love of Church functions, his enthusiasm at great feasts, carried everyone with him. "Gustate et videte" was his watchword, and those Sisters who had most to do with him reaped a blessing for life in the example set them by their learned and saintly pastor.

The Islington Convent was the only one in the Archdiocese of Westminster. Cardinal Manning sent Canon Bamber for the first canonical visitation, and his verdict was, after viewing the Sisters' premises: "St. Francis of Assisi could not have carried poverty to a higher pitch."

But the work of the community was confined to one parish. There were no outlying schools, and in 1898 it was judged advisable that our Sisters should be replaced by other religious.

The convent at Birkdale may be classed among those

foundations connected with the 1870 Code, although when it opened in 1868 it was merely intended to serve as a sanatorium for the Lancashire houses. But when, on the Feast of St. Ignatius, Sister Marie Thérésia told her community that the first detachment from Mount Pleasant were to travel in pairs, one of the Sisters quoted demurely from the Gospel of the day, where Our Lord is mentioned as sending His disciples "two by two before His Face into every city and place where He was Himself to come."

Sure enough, it was not long before the inhabitants of the little seaside town agitated for the opening of two schools to provide for the Catholic instruction of their daughters, and in 1870 a permanent Superior was named—Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament, one of the three Miss Pykes from Preston who have done good work as Sisters of Notre Dame.

Meanwhile other applications for our Sisters had to be refused, firmly and courteously, yet not too regretfully, since in each case the interests of God's glory were safeguarded in the competent hands of other religious Orders. Thus, in Ireland the poorer classes were already well catered for, and, as Sister Mary of St. Francis explained to Dr. Moriarty, "the instruction of the well-to-do is not the principal end of our Institute."

The needs of existing English houses had prevented the Sisters of Notre Dame from accepting Archbishop Polding's cordial invitation to Sydney as far back as 1855. For similar reasons the idea could not be entertained of a second training college for elementary schoolmistresses in connection with the convent at St. George's, when, under the altered conditions of the 1870 Code, the supply of Catholic teachers no longer kept pace with the demand. But the Ladies of the Sacred Heart were made welcome to study our methods

at Mount Pleasant; and Sister Marie Thérésia and her Sisters were encouraged to give them every help available from sixteen years' experience. "It will be our contribution to the new Training College, and a very important one," wrote Sister Mary of St. Francis.

During the anxiety about the Education Bill there was a day's uninterrupted prayer at Namur, where the Sisters replaced one another hour by hour before the Tabernacle. The choicest hours, such as recreation times, were reserved for the English novices. Sister Mary of St. Francis explained the Bill to them in Saint Ignace, and saw that they read about it in the *Tablet*. It was well for the English schools of Notre Dame in this season of stress that there was a heart and brain at the Mother-House alive to their requirements, and seeing to it, kindly and firmly, that the certificated Sisters were distributed according to needs.

"I quite understand that you are anxious to keep Sister Clare of St. Joseph," she writes to one Superior, "but make no further representations; they are useless and only grieve Ma Mère."

"They are sorry to lose you at Clapham," she writes a few years later, "but sacrifices are the index of graces when good has to be done."

The Sisters directly employed in education knew that she wished them to write to her freely and frequently about their labours, difficulties, success, and failures. No detail affecting their well-doing or happiness was too minute to escape her motherly solicitude.

"I have never thanked you for several letters," she writes to one. "You know how little time I have at my disposal. Thank you also for the examination papers written by the first and second classes. They appear very satisfactory."

She tells another: "I am always doubly grateful



when anyone writes to me. I have so seldom time to answer any but business letters."

Yet she found time, or made it, when any of her former novices needed the comfort or encouragement she could so well impart.

"I hope that you are going on nicely, and that my little remarks are only remembered to help you on. Some of your troubles are no doubt over, but fresh ones are sure to come. Trials of some sort are the portion of a Sister of Notre Dame, but none beyond our strength and grace. I wish you enough to make a saint! You know that I feel much interest in your happiness. This must be the reward of struggle; but cast all your care on God, He will give you strength at the right moment."

Occasionally a graver tone of warning was needed, lest a Sister become too engrossed in study for its own sake.

"May God protect you from an increased zeal for intellectual activity which shall not be accompanied, in at least a corresponding degree, by an increased love for the interior life, by an increased yearning for those only true joys which the Holy Ghost reserves for those who abandon to Him their whole heart. May God protect you from seeking any part of your rest and peace in the empty, delusive, and most unspiritualizing pleasure of mere intellectual excitement."

Even letters written in a lighter vein to cheer an invalid convey a hint of higher possibilities.

"I send you a Life of your dear rollicking, patron saint," she tells a client of the great St. Columkille. "As his life is more admirable than imitable, one reading will suffice; and as we have only one copy, I must ask for it back by some opportunity. If the choice of name involved the duty of close imitation, I



should be curious to see how you would fulfil it. I shall look for resemblances when we meet."

In the summer of 1871 Sister Mary of St. Francis was deputed by Mère Constantine to visit the English houses of Notre Dame. This four months in her native land was in some ways trying to her humility, as a circular from Namur enjoined on the Sisters to omit none of the ceremonies customary at the visitations made by the Superior-General in person. But obedience outweighed her natural shrinking from tokens of honour. She played her allotted part with her usual simple dignity, and there were many consoling compensations. Probably in each house which she visited, the headings of her final discourse to the community were similar to those which she jotted down for Clapham.

"Good news for Ma Mère. No abuses, thank God! Interior silence to prepare for the Retreat."

And yet she did her work thoroughly. Not a single irregularity, or departure from the customs of the Institute, seems to have escaped her vigilance.

"You have many pious pictures about the house," she remarked to one Superior. "That is well, but I should like to see a few more crucifixes."

Elsewhere a sacristan, arranging the altar in her presence, received a rebuke for genuflecting, when passing before the Tabernacle, without going down the altar steps to do so. Nothing, in her eyes, was unimportant if connected with the personal service of our Eucharistic Lord. Great was her indignation to find in another convent, where building operations were going on, that articles of furniture, extraneous to the Divine worship, had been temporarily stowed in the sacristy.

All the Sisters were her personal friends. Most of

them, indeed, had been either fellow-novices or her spiritual children since her profession. She made herself all to all, inquiring with motherly interest into every detail affecting their health and happiness.

They confided to her very readily their secret joys and griefs, and each one left her presence lifted up and strengthened, and animated to fresh endurance and endeavours.

One Sister, rather given to introversion, complained that she had never a moment to herself. But Sister Mary of St. Francis, having first elicited from her that she had the full time for her spiritual exercises, and was never absent from community gatherings, told her she had cause to be thankful that her day was so well filled, every hour regulated and sanctified by obedience. "If you have time for prayer, for meals, and for sleep, I do not see how you can call yourself overburdened. A Sister of Notre Dame ought to be delighted to have a full day, so that all her time may be given to God."

Another, who had been trained by her in the noviciate, was constrained by circumstances to spend every day the midday recreation with a companion of uncongenial temperament.

"How do you and Sister —— get on together?"

"Very well indeed," was the truthful reply. "But, you know, Ma Mère St. Francis, it is all artificial on both sides."

She looked up with a well-pleased smile. "*Supernatural*, I hope you mean!" And the epithet and the confident tone proved an efficacious stimulant in the dull days to come.

"I was in sore trouble about some point connected with education," notes another former novice. "I explained it to her, and she gave me her sympathy;

but I needed more than that. She grasped the peculiarities of my position better when she had visited the other houses, and on her return to Namur she wrote me a beautiful letter, full of practical advice."

In religion, at least, it is usually the faithful and wise servant whom the Lord setteth over His family; and unless under stress of exceptional temptations, Sisters of Notre Dame have, as a rule, little difficulty in recognizing the good qualities of those "sitting in the chair of Moses." After listening, with a smile, to a young Sister's gush of enthusiastic rhapsody anent the perfections of her local Superior, Sister Mary of St. Francis began singing softly, with due regard to emphasis:

"She's all my fancy painted her,  
She's lovely, she's divine!  
But her heart it is Another's,  
It never can be mine!"

"There, my dear! Are you not shocked to hear an old nun like myself singing love-songs?"

The educational crisis, of course, entailed much moving of mistresses from one house to another, an uprooting of affections, always painful to nature—albeit our Rule says explicitly: "The Sisters must always be ready to go wherever Obedience shall send them." One Superior, very much respected by Sister Mary of St. Francis, confided to her that she shuddered at the bare idea of leaving the place where she was stationed.

"But," was the earnest answer, "is it not indispensable for us to aim, at least, at the state of mind required by our holy Rule? You must really strive, with the help of God's grace, to overcome your present very imperfect dispositions."

The mistresses in the Government schools engrossed, as the exigency warranted, much of her attention

during this visit of 1871. At her request, Sister Mary of St. Philip came up to St. George's, to explain the New Code to her Sisters in the South, and Sister Mary of St. Francis was always present at these lectures, the most humbly attentive in the audience, and continually inviting the mistresses to ask questions and expose their individual difficulties. She was strenuously emphatic then, and on all subsequent occasions, on conscientious fidelity to the time-table, and scrupulous accuracy in class-rolls and everything connected with Government accounts. Great was her delight when Sister Marie Thérésia, as a reminder of "the things that are Cæsar's," had a large painting of Our Lord, with the Coin of the Tribute, hung conspicuously in a corridor at Mount Pleasant.

But the "things that are God's" were ever foremost in her heart. During one of her brief stays at Liverpool she is described as standing at an open window, listening to the students singing hymns in the garden, "with a never-to-be-forgotten look of humble, grateful joy upon her face."

The Training School, indeed, was ever her great consolation, and a source of interest second only to the English novices at Namur. She envied the subalterns on the college staff, because, as she said, "All the credit of the success goes to the heads of the establishment; thus the "undertones" enjoy exceptional chances of self-repression and humility, and are privileged, all the same, to work incessantly at fitting girls to take up the management of schools where children learn to save their souls."

Mount Pleasant was now to sever its connection with Mr. Stokes; but his successors in the Inspectorate have invariably proved appreciative friends. Their eulogies in speeches and reports would fill a volume.

One sentence may be fitly quoted here, in support of Sister Mary of St. Francis's theory of the "undertones." It occurs in Canon Warburton's address to the students on his first visit as Inspector-in-Chief of Training Colleges for Women (1881).

"Imbue yourselves with the spirit of the place: a spirit of docility, of humility, of self-forgetfulness, and, above all, of transparent simplicity."

In his last report, issued to the Educational Department as Inspector of Schools exclusively Catholic, Mr. Stokes spoke highly of our work as teachers. "In large, populous places I know of no communities so well qualified to promote education as the Sisters of Notre Dame."

These words were written in 1870. No wonder, then, that in the following year Sister Mary of St. Francis derived much pleasure from her visits to each of our crowded schools. She went to all the standards, examining the needlework, copy-books, and slates, and questioning the children. She enjoyed the singing, too, but did not examine.

"I cannot understand this tonic sol-fa. I suppose I am too old to learn!"

There were at that time in St. Helens two schools in the Sacred Heart Parish: one in a congested, insanitary district, the other amid more genteel surroundings near the church, and rather overcrowded just then. One class was relegated to an attic, which was reached by a staircase, very steep, very badly lighted, and guiltless of balustrade. Mounting these stairs was not very easy for her—she was sixty years of age, with joints stiffened by rheumatism. But the coming down! The Superior of St. Helens stood below in frightened prayer, while she descended the twenty steps backwards on hands and knees.



“And now,” she said, when she reached the bottom without mishap, “shall we start for Mount Street?”

Sister Mary Anne explained to her that there was smallpox in that district, that Ma Mère would not approve of her running unnecessary risks, and that some other treat would be arranged to pacify the children.

She remained for a few moments in thought and prayer. “Ma Mère would not approve of my exposing myself, without sufficient reason, to the risk of infection,” she argued. “But cowardice is more contagious even than smallpox. Let us go to Mount Street. God will protect us!”

And they went, and had a delightful afternoon, and no evil results ensued.

There was much sickness in England that year; and in November, while the Heir to the Throne hovered between life and death, the Sisters at Clapham were obliged to disperse their boarding-school on the same deplorable account. For at Clapham, as at Sandringham, recent building operations had interfered with the drains. Already, in the summer, the headmistress was distressed by the unwonted languor and apathy of her pupils.

“Pay great attention to their health,” was Sister Mary of St. Francis’s advice. “Vary the food as far as possible, and keep them much in the open air.”

Neither she nor anyone else suspected the real cause of the mischief, though she herself was so affected by the latent microbes that she was obliged to prolong her stay at Sheffield for upwards of a week in enforced seclusion. After a day or two she sent for the headmistress.

“Why is the house so still? I never hear the voices of the children at play?”



CLAPHAM CONVENT

The Chapel and Lady Chapel



"Indeed, they are real, good little mice," was the reply. "They know you are ill, and that we are taking every precaution to insure you perfect quiet."

"Oh, let them jump about, and laugh—yes, and *shout*! If anything will do me good, it will be to hear them enjoying themselves."

There had been building, too, at Northampton that spring, happily with less disastrous results. Mère Constantine, always anxious about her assistant's health, had told her, before she left Belgium, not to lodge in the new wing, lest some dampness be still lurking in its walls. The Reverend Mother would certainly have revoked the prohibition had she seen the spacious room prepared, easy of access, with pleasant outlook, and perfectly dry. But the obedient religious would not make use of it, even for one night, although the only room available at such short notice was inconveniently situated over the elementary school.

"Just the place for me," she said, smiling. "I, too, am a poor woman."

Lord Stafford visited her at Northampton, and was highly amused at the contrast between the parlour (as yet unvarnished and unpapered) and the elegant little dinner—"fit for an emperor," as he phrased it—served to him therein. And here we may remark that Sister Mary of St. Francis had so often impressed upon Superiors the duty of hospitality towards the relatives of their Sisters, that she could only utter a very feeble protest, if even that, at the way her own friends were entertained in the different houses. But on each such occasion she was careful to express her appreciative gratitude to both portress and cook.

October was well advanced before she left for Belgium. Her farewell sentence brought a smile to every lip in the Clapham Community.

" I think I may tell Ma Mère that I have not stroked a single pussy this summer, though I have seen some very nice ones !"

" Little animals of pastime " are excluded by rule from the communities of Notre Dame, and it was well known in the Institute how much Mère Constantine disliked all fondling, even of the " necessary cat." Her assistant, on the other hand, as behoved a client of " sweet St. Francis of Assisi," was distinguished by her love for all dumb creatures. Many pretty traits of this are on record. For instance, a mouse-trap had once been set in her room, and duly baited with a tempting bit of cheese. But when she awoke in the night and heard the click which announces a capture, it was too much for her kind heart. The misery of the forlorn little prisoner behind the bars kept her awake, till at last she got up and set it free.

In her visitations she never failed to inquire if there was a sister named " to see that the cat did not starve," and she condemned the practice of allowing only one kitten at a time to be reared, because " every young thing needs a playmate."

On the other hand, she would never permit the mistresses in the schools to encourage their pupils to compete for the prizes offered annually by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

" The children would have to read up the subject," she explained, " and probably imbibe morbid sentimentality and unorthodox ideas."



## CHAPTER XXII

“ JOIN THYSELF TO GOD, AND ENDURE ”\*

“ Dole not thy duties out to God,  
But let thy hand be free.  
Look long at Jesus ! His dear Blood,  
How was it dealt to thee ?”

FABER.

“ HAPPY as a queen, or rather as a good and sensible Sister of Notre Dame.” The phrase occurs in one of Sister Mary of St. Francis’s letters; and as she penned it she may have mentally contrasted her own life, minutely mapped out by Rule and custom, with a queen’s life, lived in the full centre of “ that fierce light that beats upon the throne,” its every instant in wearisome conformity with the exigencies of Court ceremonial. But a queen, exhausted by the endless round of functions, may sometimes hear, above the loyal plaudits of her subjects, the questioning voice of her Creator:

“ Paid by the world, what dost thou owe Me ?”

This faithful daughter of Blessed Julie, on the other hand, was just as punctilious to *her* code of etiquette, but had the happy confidence in all she did:

“ It is God will repay ; I am safer so !”

Indeed, she contrived to put such zest into her most ordinary actions that they never degenerated into routine. “ Obedience,” she said, “ is everything.

\* Ecclus. ii. 3.

When a soul has made an efficacious resolution to go to God by obedience, the devil is powerless and can do her no harm. God will never punish us for having obeyed. To act of our own accord, on the other hand, is to have all the difficulty and much less merit."

There was never a time in her life when she did not cheerfully obey. We have seen how obedience was insisted on in the Costessey nursery and schoolroom; how unflinchingly for nineteen years she proved her husband's submissive helpmate; how the first use she made of her widowed freedom was to bind herself by a vow, extending from one feast of Our Lady to another, to obey the behests of her spiritual director. As Sister of Notre Dame she could write: "God, our Creator, has a right to our obedience. Superiors are in the place of God: it is we ourselves who put them in His place when we make to God a Vow of Obedience."

Yet she did not minimize the sacrifice entailed by this perpetual dependence. Her quotation from St. Gregory, "It is easier to get rid of what one has than of what one is," warns us that it is quite possible to lay undue stress on the renunciation of worldly self, contingent on her entrance into religion. Probably, indeed, she would have felt more acutely the pinch of actual poverty had she remained her own mistress, for her compassionate heart would have reduced her at times to barest necessities in order to increase her alms. But her cheerful acquiescence in the will of her Superiors throughout her thirty-six years as a Sister of Notre Dame, her very literal and minute conformity to the Rules and customs of her Order—it was this especially which edified her Sisters, was an unintermittent fountain of joy in her own soul, and made her days full in God's sight and rich in merit for eternity.

We glean from notes made just before her profession in 1852 that she is resolved “not to seek perfection outside duties” and to observe perfectly, “in a spirit of love and gratitude,” the Rule of her Order, “that law of love which God has given us as our necessary way to reach perfection, that so our lives may be a continual act of love of God and of union with Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Perfection for me,” she writes again, “is to consist in profiting rightly of every occasion that presents itself, well satisfied when I have some suffering to offer God, and humble when God gladdens me with consolations, in order to sustain my weakness and to remind me that religious life, although a perpetual sacrifice, is not always a painful one.”

Her life as a nun was consistent with these her very real sentiments. There was in it no singularity in virtue or in devotional practices, nothing outside the scope of any Sister of Notre Dame—unless, indeed, that *interior silence* which Mère Aloysie considered her great characteristic, and which she herself admitted to be incompatible with certain temperaments. But it was just this ordinary life which influenced, by its thoroughness, all those with whom she had dealings.

Thus, it was remarked, as an instance of her spirit of Faith, that she went to Confession, with the greatest simplicity and ease, to any priest. She saw Our Lord in His delegate, and she wanted no one else. To a Sister, who had not reached this state of holy indifference as regards the confessor, she once gave this advice:

“When you enter the confessional, kneel in spirit at the foot of the Cross on Calvary, and before beginning your accusation form an ardent desire that the

Precious Blood may drop gently on your soul in order to purify it."

"This was no new idea to me," remarks the Sister who recalls the incident, "but Sister Mary of St. Francis had a gift for bringing the simplest truths home in a vivid and forcible way."

As for Holy Communion, she considered it "the greatest act of worship which a creature on earth can pay to his Creator." The exact observance of her Rule was, in her eyes, the best "remote" preparation, and immediately before approaching the Altar-rails she reflected on the special fruit she hoped to derive from the sacred banquet, and spoke of it tenderly with Our Lord.

"I receive the Blessed Sacrament," she wrote, "in order that God may reign in me in the plenitude of His Almighty Power, that His pure truths alone may dwell in my thoughts, His Wisdom direct my steps, His Love inflame my heart, His Might strengthen my hand to work for His Glory, and His Holiness satisfy my soul."

Her sign of the Cross always seemed, what in fact it was, an act of faith made in full consciousness of the Presence of God. It was her first intuitive gesture when she awoke from her fever-trance as a girl of fifteen, and its reverence impressed the priest who attended her on her death-bed. "When I am complimented on the way I make the sign of the Cross," writes an English Sister, "I think of my dear Mère St. Francis, who took such pains with us over it. I once had to repeat it four or five times at Conference before it was achieved to her satisfaction."

She loved this sacred symbol, as expressing her tender devotion to the Blessed Trinity. We find in her notes frequent allusions to this "humility-inspiring

queen of mysteries,” as Faber calls it, and lengthy excerpts, chiefly from St. Thomas, to freshen her piety and help her to realize more vividly

“How nigh to Greatness is our dust,  
How close to God is man !”

All this was intensely practical. She was on her guard against “that false spirituality which professes to lead man to God otherwise than by His divinely appointed way, Jesus Christ, the God-Man given to us by God, to be our Wisdom, our Justice, our Holiness, and our Redemption.” Hence her delight in the liturgical devotions connected with Our Lord’s sacred humanity, hence her care to say the Angelus with reverence. She was fond of repeating Faber’s words that this pious practice, faithfully persisted in, is enough to make a saint, and she taught others to value it as a personal consecration to the Incarnate Word—in the case of religious as a reminder and renewal of their vows.

Her favourite devotions were those in most ordinary use among the faithful, or stamped with the hall-mark of the Church’s approval in the shape of indulgences. She loved the Hail Mary, and utilized its *gratia plena* to congratulate Our Lady on her Immaculate Conception, a mystery to which she was especially devout. As wearer of the Blue Scapular in honour of this dogma, she could gain considerable indulgences by reciting six times the *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Gloria*; and she never failed to kneel down and make use of this privilege when she heard of a friend’s death and was unable just then to make the Way of the Cross. She took care that the Church suffering should benefit to the full extent of her prayers and good works. When she saw a Sister hesitating before some disagreeable occa-



sion of merit she would usually encourage her pleasantly by the playful reproach:

“What, Sister! Are there no more souls left in Purgatory?”

There is nothing extraordinary in all this, nor about anything else in her ordinary round of duties. But then, as Bishop Ullathorne says, “What we do matters really very little. It is the adjectives and the adverbs that God rewards.”

She said to a pupil one 31st of December: “We must do everything very perfectly to-day, in the spirit of atonement for our shortcomings during the past year. And all to-morrow we must be equally particular, so that we may begin the New Year well—as we mean, please God, to continue.”

“Her confidence in God,” a Sister writes, “was firm and filial; and the childlike fear, which dreads to displease the best of Fathers, overflowed from her heart into the hearts of those whom she helped to draw closer to God. She liked to quote St. Teresa’s words: ‘It is better to think of pleasing God rather than of avoiding sin’; and those of Bossuet, ‘At the hour of death God will allow the acts of hope which we have made during life to hold good.’”

“She often said to me: ‘Confidence must be our life. Try to acquire the habit of going to God with calm and peaceful trust.’”

“When the dread summons to Eternity reached herself, she could say with simple sincerity: ‘I am in the hands of God.’”

“As to prayer, I believe her soul was well versed in spirituality, and that she possessed the simplicity which is a characteristic of saintly souls in dealing with God. ‘We must go to God quietly,’ she said, ‘enter into familiar conversation with Him, expose

our needs very simply: “My God, I can do nothing. Accept my weakness; help me!” Love God *tout doucement*, quietly, gently, sweetly.’ However pressing her other occupations, she always faithfully devoted the full time allotted to her daily exercises of piety, and she exhorted those over whom she had influence never to omit them unless under stress of obedience. She said to me one day: ‘We stand so much in need of God! And so long as no wilful infidelity breaks the resolution to serve Him which we make the first thing in the morning, the presence of God is *there*,” and she pointed to her own heart. ‘We feel Him *there*, deep down there.’ ”

In the eighteenth chapter we have told, in Sister Mary of St. Francis’s own words, how the first hours of each day were engrossed with God, in mental prayer and at Holy Mass. She never recommended to others anything which she did not perfectly practise herself. Her frequent distressing illnesses sometimes rendered Holy Mass and Communion a sheer impossibility; but her other spiritual exercises were never neglected or perfunctorily performed.

“How often,” says Mère Aloysie, “have I found her propped up in bed, with a note-book, a pencil, and an open book before her, and so busied with her evening meditation, or in preparing her points for the morrow, that she seemed alike oblivious of her physical sufferings and unconscious of any human presence in the room.”

The morning hour seems to have required more formal effort of the will, and to have been a deliberate homage of her intellectual faculties to God, if we may judge from the elaborate scheme among her notes, to insure that, despite dryness and distractions, His Divine Majesty should receive due honour from her *reasonable*

service. In this connection she quotes from Faber's *Foot of the Cross*.

"God's greatest mercy to His creatures is to allow them to contribute to His glory, intelligently and voluntarily. Rightly considered, the creature can have no blessedness so great as that of contributing to the glory of the Creator. It is the only true satisfaction, both of his understanding and his will, the only thing that can be to him an everlasting rest."

The evening meditation seems usually to have been more fraught with sensible sweetness. "It glorifies God," she said, "when we spend this half-hour thanking Him for graces received."

In her particular examen, while adhering strictly to the method prescribed by St. Ignatius, she paused long on the preliminary act of thanksgiving. "When we love people we like to thank them for their kindness," she explained. Her act of contrition included the sins of her whole life as well as the shortcomings of the day. "On leaving the chapel after our examen we should always feel ready for death," she said, "so let the act of sorrow and purpose of amendment be made with great recollection and good-will. Take resolutions *with* God, relying on His grace."

The love of God gave her strength to persevere in a life of abnegation and death to self. "We must learn to leave all to God," she would say. "Besides, He is our only Friend. If there has been the least little infidelity on this point, oh! how soon do our hearts return to Him!"

"The attitude of desire," she said again, "waiting for God, looking towards Him, ought to be the usual posture of the soul. And if we desire God thus ardently we shall pray to Him with real fervour; for prayer brings us life from God, and is in very truth the main-

spring of our spiritual life. We shall, moreover, offer Him the undivided holocaust of our hearts. As religious we make profession to give Him our all. It is little indeed that we have to give, but God requires that we give Him that little. He wishes for it—nay, He asks us to give it.”

This whole-hearted and unreserved oblation left no room in her life for minor grievance or petty annoyance. There are many hints in her note-books that her lot was not exempt from the hall-mark of God's elect, approving them pure gold. For instance, “The Cross is to be joyfully embraced as part of the day's work. The most sanctifying among crosses are those attached to the duties of our state; and they are intended in the scheme of Divine Providence to be carried shoulder-high, and not fussed over or dragged along.”

Perhaps we know so little of her interior trials just because of her recorded resolve to use her will “to glorify the adorable Will of God by free acceptance of the Crosses which He imposes, never seeing the Cross without the Crucified.”

Unlike, in this one particular, to the majority of God's chosen friends, Sister Mary of St. Francis seems to have had little to suffer from the perversity of her fellow-men. The afflictions which God saw fit to send her, “because He knows Himself all-powerful to derive from them a greater good,” came in the shape of ill-health, the loss of friends in death, and the shadows cast by the sorrows of others. In every case she accepted them humbly, and a favourite prayer with her was that of St. Augustine:

“Lord, take my heart, for I cannot give it to Thee; keep my heart, for I cannot keep it for Thee; give me any cross, to keep me in subjection to Thy Cross, and save me in spite of myself.”

She sometimes added: "We need not seek crosses. It is enough if we *welcome* the one which God sends us when He sends it. 'Sicut vis et scis, Domine, et innumerabiles honestas cum illa.'"

She suffered from heart disease, bronchitis, and frequent sick headaches, with spells of acute rheumatism and gout; and these infirmities increased with age in intensity and duration. In sickness, as in health, she set a bright example to her fellow-religious; for she took her sufferings bravely, as "a few drops from Christ's own Chalice of Bitterness," and in her cheerful acquiescence in His adorable Will, she never allowed a complaint to escape her lips. Only when the pain became too unbearable she sang or hummed some familiar tune.

"I really cannot keep quiet," she said between the paroxysms, "and I think it is better to sing than to cry out or groan."

She never expressed the faintest wish for any medical advice other than that supplied by the doctor who usually attended the community; and her gratitude for every alleviation or service, however trifling, was minute in its thoughtful delicacy. She was mindful, too, to inform Ma Mère whenever the Sister nursing her underwent extra fatigue or had to forego a portion of her night's rest.

To those unacquainted with the ways of Notre Dame it may be necessary to remark that every attention was lavished upon her during sickness, and that the infirmarians, as their Rule enjoins, served her with cheerful alacrity.

"You could never have had such affectionate nursing in the world," said the health-mistress to her one day, with perhaps a pardonable touch of self-complacency.



“I don’t know about that,” she replied. “My old Kitty always took very good care of me.”

The affections of her childhood remained, to the last, vigorous and tender. Her face lit up at the bare mention of Costessey, and her kinsfolk to the second and third generation had a very warm corner in her heart. Every August Madame Drévelle came from Amiens to make the Ladies’ Retreat at Namur, and the pupils loved to watch the still sprightly old lady as she paced the garden, leaning on the arm of her former pupil and very markedly the object of her kindly solicitude.

But as we grow older the gaps become more numerous in the circle of our intimate friends. Who is there among us who has not realized at one time and another the truth in Father Faber’s lines:

“The Land beyond the Sea !  
Oh ! how the lapsing years,  
’Mid our not unsubmitive tears,  
Have borne—now singly, now in fleets—the biers  
Of those we love, to thee,  
Calm Land beyond the Sea !”

It was Sister Mary of St. Francis’s lot to outlive most of her early friends. They had the benefit of her prayers, and she the merit of whole-hearted resignation. Three times, in the course of 1874, did the vault at Costessey open to receive a beloved brother. In a letter, dated October 19th, we find her writing:

“I am sure you have been praying for me if you heard of my having lost two of my brothers—the two younger ones. William died on the 16th of July, and Francis on the 10th of October. Both were good Catholics, so I have every hope for their dear souls. . . . Trials thicken as we advance in age, all merciful tolls of the Great Bell.”

Another "merciful toll" was heard before the end of the year, this time for an elder brother, George—the one most resembling her in feature. His death occurred with tragic suddenness in London on the 11th of November. The night before, he remained sitting up to read, after his servant had retired. When the man came to call him at half-past seven next morning, Mr. Jerningham was found paralyzed in his arm-chair. He expired, without recovering full consciousness, an hour before Lord Stafford could reach him. But his death, though sudden, had been preceded by a long life of Christian usefulness; and Dr. Husenbeth could speak words of comfort and truth at the funeral, when he referred to—

"The prayers he poured forth at the beginning and end of each day, the Masses he heard with marked and reverent devotion, the charities he performed and carefully concealed in other lands and in this. . . .

"He was a distinguished diplomatist," the preacher went on, "and served his country long and well. After forty years of labour for her welfare she allows him to bear the letters C.B. on his coffin-plate. We cannot but hope that Almighty God, whom he has also served, will be a more just and a more liberal rewarder."

The same year—1874—the Sisters of Notre Dame celebrated with enthusiasm the Reverend Mother's Golden Jubilee of Profession. Under her firm and prudent government the Institute had greatly enlarged its sphere of usefulness on either side of the Atlantic. Sixty-eight convents owed to her their existence: the seventeen in England, and the six in Guatemala, twenty-three out of the forty-seven then in Belgium, and twenty-two of the twenty-three in the United States. But a terrible cross cast its shadow over the

Jubilee rejoicings. Her daughters were driven from Guatemala, as a consequence of one of those political and anti-religious upheavals which seemed chronic in Spanish-speaking America during the last century. The exiles found work and a welcome in our Californian convents; but the twelve hundred young souls they were forced to abandon, half-educated, were very dear to the heart of Mère Constantine, and the Sisters whispered one to another, “Guatemala is killing Ma Mère!”

From the date of her Jubilee (September 14th, 1874) her health rapidly declined, and her religious daughters realized with concern that they could not hope to keep her much longer upon earth. The doctor, who ministered to her with the dutiful affection of a son, relied much on Sister Mary of St. Francis to cheer the invalid and report to him on her symptoms. He openly acknowledged that when he acted on her suggestions he never had reason to repent it. Ma Mère herself had implicit confidence in her experience and skill; and when the infirmarians asked her what she could fancy in the way of food, she used to answer simply:

“Go and ask Sister Mary of St. Francis. She will tell you what it is best for me to have.”

Her physical strength declined gradually in the summer and early autumn of 1875, although her mental faculties remained clear to the last. On Sunday, the 17th of October, she received the Last Sacraments with calm joy, and sent down word to the community to have recreation at dinner in honour of the event.

The Sisters were now allowed free access to her room, some of them for lengthy talks.

“Oh, my child,” she said to one, “how angry it

makes me when I see you staying away from Holy Communion!"

The Sister faltered something about St. Paul's words and her fear of eating and drinking unworthily.

"Do not tell me, for I will not believe you, that your heart, which has received so many graces from Our Lord, can be attached to aught that displeases Him. A false humility keeps you away from the Holy Table, or rather a certain languor in God's service which hinders you from working at your perfection—those other words of St. Paul, in fact, 'He that will not work let him not eat.' Come, child, languor, after all, is but weakness, to be got rid of by frequent recourse to the Blessed Eucharist, the divinely appointed food of the soul."

"Ma Mère," urged the Sister, "you know I stay away on account of my faults and imperfections."

"That is no reason. For my own part, I am never so desirous of Holy Communion as when I feel the most acutely my own defects. For then I have such horror of myself, I realize so utterly my poverty and misery, that self shrinks to very small compass, and Our Lord has more room to work in my soul."

Two days later—October 25th—the end came. Sister Superior Aloysie and Sister Mary of St. Francis were with her to the last. It was the sole time, say the Sisters, Ma Mère Aloysie was seen to weep. The chaplain, the only one in the death-chamber perfectly self-possessed, saw to it that every rubric for the dying was carried out in minutest detail, till at last he rose from his knees with the solemn words: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

The following extract from a letter of Sister Mary of St. Francis speaks for itself. We can read controlled emotion in the crisp, abrupt sentences.

“NAMUR,

“November 4th, 1875.

“MY DEAR ANNIE,

“I felt sure you would grieve with us for notre chère Mère. I would have written to tell you the sad news had I known where you were. Thank you for your kind sympathy and the promise of a Mass.

“Our dear Mère had been long suffering, though able to go about a little, and not confined to bed till about three weeks ago, when she became rapidly worse, and was so anxious to have the grace of the Sacraments. She received Extreme Unction on the 17th with the greatest presence of mind and joy. She had Holy Communion almost every day after that. The Bishop anointed her. It was awfully solemn and heartbreaking.

“On the 24th she began to sink, and died on the 25th, quite calm. I feel so sure she is with God. She will take care of us all—you included, dear Annie.”

The Requiem Mass at Mère Constantine's funeral was very solemn. The touching words of the Liturgy were chanted by a full choir of priests, while the Sisters could only weep and pray in religious silence. A very large dole of bread was distributed to the poor. For six weeks her prie-dieu in the Church remained draped in black, with her rosary and book of Rules atop.

Meanwhile, as the Constitutions enjoined, steps were being taken to insure the speedy election of her successor in office. The American houses waived their rights on this occasion, and sent word they would abide by the choice of their European Sisters. But in every Convent of Notre Dame in Belgium and in England a fixed proportion of the Professed were chosen by ballot to take part in the election. By the first Sunday



in Advent all the English delegates had reached Namur, where the next three days were spent in prayer and deliberation.

On Thursday, December 2nd, Monsignor Gravez, Bishop of Namur, and his Vicar-General, M. Delogne, arrived at the convent about half-past seven, and the Votive Mass of the Holy Ghost was followed by Solemn Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

At half-past nine His Lordship addressed to the assembled voters a brief discourse on the nature of their responsibilities. They were allowed an interval for reflection and quiet prayer before proceeding to the record and scrutiny of the votes. A deep and solemn silence prevailed, as each paper was unfolded and examined by the duly appointed ecclesiastics and Sisters, and its contents registered and proclaimed aloud.

"This is becoming monotonous," remarked the Bishop pleasantly, as time after time the same name vibrated through the silent room. And whenever the words "Ma Sœur Marie de St. François" came as an occasional variant, he turned to her with a bow and a smile.

At last everyone rises, and the Bishop announces the result of the scrutiny.

"Out of two hundred and fifteen votes, Sister Aloysie has two hundred and ten, Sister Mary of St. Francis three, and Sister Julie and Sister Marie Thérésia one each."

Pale with suppressed emotion, the newly-elected Mother-General kneels in silence for the blessing, by which Monsignor Gravez conveys to her his formal approbation of the Institute's choice.

Then Sister Mary of St. Francis advances in her turn, and presents to him, to be blessed anew, the



REV. MOTHER ALOYSIE

Sixth Superior-General of the Sisters of Notre Dame



medal worn successively by our Reverend Mothers as their badge of office. This medal she next pins upon the breast of her dearest friend on earth, and then each member of the chapter comes forward to make obeisance, in the name of the Institute, to its responsible head. Last of all, the venerable chaplain, Canon Carpiaux, approaches slowly to tender his congratulations.

“We will bear the burden together,” he whispers, by way of encouragement.

“And now,” says the Bishop, “we will all go to church, to render thanks to God for the very good deed you have just performed.”

Meanwhile the pupils in the boarding-school, who had settled down in their recreation hall for a morning’s quiet amusement, were startled to their feet by the sound of the great bell, as it boomed forth the glad tidings to the environs of Namur. They stood in tense silence, all eyes fixed on the door. It opened at last, and the head-mistress appeared on the threshold.

“Put on your hats,” she announced. “We are going to sing the *Te Deum* for the election of——”

They did not give her time to finish. “Ma Mère Aloysie!” was shouted in jubilant chorus.

But the quiet command, “Take your ranks!” effectually postponed all display of enthusiasm to a more convenient season.

Their prompt amenity to discipline brought its own reward. For the double files had to halt in the long glass-panelled gallery leading to the church, just in time for a splendid view of the long procession moving across the courtyard. First came the Bishop with the newly-elected Mother-General, her medal glittering in the frosty sunshine; and the awestruck whisper went round:

“ See her face, as white as her wimple !”

The Vicar-General and the Chaplain came next, and then the long files of Sisters, walking two by two. The pupils joined in—in the rear of the postulants. As they entered the sacred edifice, furtive glances were cast in the direction of the Reverend Mother’s prie-dieu, draped for this solitary occasion in cashmere of Our Lady’s colours, white and blue. Certain keen eyes detected that Mère Aloysie had quietly discarded the cushion placed for her upon the kneeler.

A very reverend and soul-stirring *Te Deum* was followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and a little before eleven o’clock the Bishop and priests went home. Mère Aloysie spent the next hour in silent prayer before the Most Holy, and at the midday meal she faced her new daughters.

“ I have two things to help me,” she told them simply : “ the grace of God and your good feeling towards me.”

Six days later, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, she named Sister Mary of St. Francis to be Superior of Namur and her Assistant in the government of the Congregation.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### SISTER SUPERIOR OF NAMUR

“ I saw her upon nearer view  
A spirit, yet a woman too. . . .  
A perfect woman, nobly planned,  
To warn, to comfort and command ;  
And yet a spirit still, and bright  
With something of an angel light.”

WORDSWORTH.

NATURE and grace combined to make Sister Mary of St. Francis an ideal Superior. All her virtues, all her talents, now came into play. Her charity, patient, tender, and thoughtful, embraced all her Sisters, and she had help and sympathy ever ready for each of their difficulties and sorrows. However weak or suffering she might be, no trace of fretfulness or impatience could be discerned. Her soul dwelt habitually in the pure air of those mountain-tops where the storms of earth never reach, and neither lesser worries nor graver anxieties seemed to disturb her peace. She was remarkably impartial, no personal bias ever warping or blunting her sound, acute judgment. When any question was brought before her, she went straight to the point, without letting her attention be distracted by secondary or unimportant considerations, and she knew how to disentangle matters which appeared hopelessly involved. Always equal

to herself and equal to the occasion, she could never fail to command respect; but her chief ambition was to remain the lowliest in the household of Jesus and Mary, and her new responsible rank did but cause her humility and charity to blossom forth in richer profusion, and shed around a yet sweeter fragrance.

Both these dear virtues, but especially her helpful humility, were conspicuous in her attitude towards the new Superior-General. Their common bereavement knit more closely together these two saintly souls, so well fitted to appreciate each the other; and no one who saw them together could fail to be edified by the delicate deference in their mutual relations, and to realize the truth of this remark of Mère Aloysie.

“ All that is religious is good and lasting. How sweet it is when we love one another in God ! ”

They were now two to do the work of three. Besides, as time went on, and rheumatism began to interfere with her active habits, Sister Mary of St. Francis's headaches increased in frequency and violence, incapacitating her for business for days at a time. In the readjustment of duties, the Reverend Mother took upon herself the lion's share of fatigue; while her assistant studied to keep in the background, rarely going to the parlour, and only visiting the boarding-school as her silent companion. There were many outsiders who attributed this retiring behaviour to timidity or imperfect command of the French language; and this client of St. Francis of Assisi “ counted it perfect joy ” to leave them this erroneous impression.

“ Our dear Sister Superior is only truly at home when in the midst of her own community,” was the verdict of the Namur Sisters. Here, indeed, she received very graciously their marks of affectionate esteem and confidence; but Ma Mère had always to

come first. When she made arrangements, it was always in the name of the higher authority: "Ma Mère wishes. . . . Ma Mère has decided. . . ." Never mention of her own views, her own desires. It was remarked of her by Father Clair, S.J., a man of much experience in religious biography:

"However spontaneous this *sustained abnegation* may have seemed to herself and others, it was most certainly meritorious in the sight of God, since it was the fruit of a very real and deep-rooted humility."

Yet she could come to the front when occasion demanded. When Ma Mère was absent, visiting one or other group of the Belgian houses, she saw to it that no arrears of work was accumulating at Namur. Her deferentially affectionate letters testify how promptly and prudently she disposed of business; but always "selon vos chères intentions."

Once Mère Aloysie had rather a prolonged illness, and her throat especially needed rest. Sister Mary of St. Francis quietly installed herself at her bedside, with her knitting. Her presence did not hinder the visits of the Sisters, but proved an effectual check on all prolonged and fatiguing conversation.

In England, had she willed it, she could easily have become the dominant personality; but the sole use she made of her influence was to keep all hearts attuned in loyal unison to the heart of their common mother. During the three visits which they paid to our shores it was noticed that she contrived to stay away from any community gathering at which Ma Mère would not be present. Her humility shrank from being the centre of interest, even for an hour.

Some Sisters at Mount Pleasant, we are told, wept for joy at seeing Mère Aloysie at last in their midst. A pretty trait serves to show that her fellow-traveller

would be the last to check such effervescence of affectionate loyalty. It was the hour of departure, and Ma Mère was putting on her cloak. A very young Sister espied Sister Mary of St. Francis pressing to her lips with love and reverence the veil just laid aside. "Je puis bien, c'est une sainte!" she whispered in a tone of hearty conviction, yet with a look of archly mischievous self-defence.

Mère Aloysie found much that was strange in our insular customs. But the ways of the Sisters of Notre Dame are the same all the world over, and there was no mistaking the heartiness of her welcome in all our houses. The older Sisters had been her spiritual daughters in the noviciate, the younger ones had had proofs of her homely kindness as Superior of the Mother-House, and all, without exception, revered her for the holiness of her life, and for her responsibility on their behalf as the delegate of God.

The children, too, were struck by her religious demeanour and self-effacement. During the 1879 visitation, one of the more thoughtful day-scholars of Mount Pleasant was heard to remark:

"Ma Mère can always be recalled to mind by the one word '*Humility*.'"

The Reverend Mother had heard much of the Institute's work in England; but for all that, the first sight of our flourishing schools came upon her as a pleasant surprise. Her companion, on the other hand, could now in devout thankfulness contrast the results achieved with their small beginnings, and form fresh plans to consolidate and improve. For as long as she lived, nothing important was undertaken in the English houses without her active concurrence. Her interest in each individual Sister never flagged, and this naturally brings us to speak of the second great

virtue for which the post of Superior enlarged her opportunities.

There are some beautiful thoughts about fraternal charity among her spiritual notes.

For instance: "In our actions, the trouble ought to be for ourselves, the advantage for others, and the glory for God alone!"

Again: "Charity is like a Sacrament—love of our neighbour the outward sign, and love of God the inward grace."

And this maxim of Père Surin (a saintly and much enduring Jesuit of the reign of Louis XIII.), which she seems to have well kneaded into her own life: "For God, a child's heart full of filial reverence; for the neighbour, a mother's heart, very tender and very pitiful; for self, the heart of a judge, where love must ever accord with inexorable justice."

"When giving advice," she wrote again, "it behoves us not to make parade of prudence, but to be useful to others, saying neither more nor less than suits this purpose."

"If you are rubbed up the wrong way," she told a Superior, "it is better to be silent. If you have to speak, do it not to relieve your feelings, but to calm the offenders. Forget that you have a temper, and say and do what will be most for their benefit."

This last wholesome bit of wisdom she herself seldom or never had occasion to use. In Belgium, as in England, her tact and virtue had long since won for her the love and confidence of her religious Sisters. The nuns from the secondary houses found in her, when they came to Namur, the most genial of hostesses. The following extract may serve as a sample of her dealings with her former postulants and novices, before and after she was named Superior.



“ My family objected strongly when I entered religion, and Mère St. Francis was extremely kind on account of home difficulties. After my profession I came to her room for a chat each time I returned to Namur, and she spoke with motherliness of my crosses, past and present. No details had been suffered to escape from her royally retentive memory. Once she was ill during the retreat, and I kept away from her room. She reproved me smilingly the next time we met.

“ ‘ I suppose it is a sign that things are improving. But, if so, I should like to know it. ’ ”

The members of her own community, who sought her counsel and aid in difficulties of every kind, always found her cheering, always sympathetic, always interested in their concerns. “ Many years before her death,” writes Père Girod, a zealous Jesuit stationed at Namur, “ I heard much of her truly maternal attentions to the Sisters whose chief employment is manual labour. They used to speak to me with affectionate veneration of this beloved Superior, who was always on the alert lest timidity or excess of zeal should hinder them from speaking openly to her of the worries and hardships incidental to their work. She questioned each about her charge in very great detail, and if she considered anyone seemed tired, ailing, or in low spirits, she insisted on rest being taken and extra nourishment.”

Perhaps some of these Sisters may have deemed such precautions unneeded, but she was utilizing in their behalf her experience with the English houses, where the domestic Sisters have not the iron constitutions of their Belgian compeers.

She was careful, too, to help each individual Sister to purify her intention, elevate her aims, and thus

acquire those interior virtues which give to exterior acts all their value. Thus we find her impressing upon the infirmarian to prepare the infirmary with the greatest care whenever the Blessed Sacrament was to be borne to the sick.

“Think what a privilege it is for the poor sufferers to receive Our Lord, and, remember, it is your duty to help them by every means in your power to welcome Him in a becoming manner. Besides, it is an immense honour for *you* that the King of Glory should deign to enter a room which is your especial charge.”

Let us listen to Sister Mary Ludovica's concise appreciation of the ten years she spent under the gentle rule of her former fellow-novice :

“Kindness came natural to our Sister Superior; she loved to give pleasure and make everyone happy. She liked merry hearts, and was always glad to contrive some little extra festivity which would help to promote union and sisterly affection. She had great experience in the treatment of minor ailments. The Sisters knew it well, and went for relief to her more readily than to the doctor. But charity to one's neighbour includes duties to the soul as well as to the body. Sister Superior was, at the same time, firm and kind. She knew how to say what she meant, and exacted resolutely, when needful, great sacrifices from those whom she governed. Each one's reputation was precious in her eyes, and she possessed the gift of understanding in an eminent degree. This made her listen patiently to both sides of an argument, and recognize at once wherein true justice lay.”

Her insight into character sometimes suggested to her to put each special pleader in a position to weigh the arguments of the other side. The Sisters who directed the studies of the novices did not always see

eye to eye with Mère Blandine. Sister Mary of St. Francis, who had been in her day mistress of novices and head of English Saint Ignace, could think of nothing better than to hold an informal debate in Sainte Geneviève, where both parties—two to one, but equally matched in eloquence and earnest zeal—could urge in detail the claims of their respective charges. When all the arguments were exhausted, and each began to see reason on the opposite side, the patient and amused Superior threw up her hands with a comic gesture of despair, and delivered the only verdict possible under the circumstances.

“Fight it out between you!”

Mère Constantine once asked an assembly of Superiors what, in their experience, was the devil's favourite weapon against Sisters of Notre Dame. They came to the conclusion that we had to be most on our guard against undue absorption, each in her own special charge. Sister Mary of St. Francis was particularly careful to help her Sisters in this respect, encouraging them always to mingle prayer with work, to aim at purity of intention in all they said and did—in a word, to practise her own favourite virtue, that interior silence which helps to union with God.

A member of the Namur Community used to take notes of some of her helpful remarks. “I jotted them down,” she tells us, “just as I left her room, with nothing added thereto of my own whether from heart or imagination.” A few leaves from this pocket-book may be fitly inserted here :

“We should have nobler ideas than the trifles over which you brood. Spend the time giving glory to God in praise and thanksgiving. There's an occupation more worthy of you.”

"It is good to humble ourselves at sight of our miseries. But I prefer to see a soul praising God by her deeds."

"The thought that God is so much offended in the world ought to make us avoid the smallest imperfections, so as to draw down graces on those we love."

After a fault: "Say to Our Lord with St. Teresa: 'There's another fruit out of my garden.' Then throw it over the wall by a vigorous act of strengthening sorrow. Anything well mended is strongest at the join. Apply this to the weak places in your soul."

"We must aim high in all we do. Think of an eagle carrying his nestlings on his broad strong pinions, to gaze undazzled on the face of the sun. And we, poor puny little eaglets, we, too, can soar aloft, upborne by grace, though ourselves incapable of so bold a flight. Only let us be careful not to hamper the movements of the Holy Spirit."

After an annoyance: "Dip this bitter morsel in the Heart of our dearest Lord."

"You must learn to do your work, and keep recollected the while. God is in your soul. Seek Him there, and when things go wrong with you, assure Him of your love. The best way to keep calm is not so much to brood over every annoyance, as to seek God's good pleasure in all things, in trouble as in joy."

"Each time you realize that God is not the object of your thoughts, come back to Him quietly; He is so near!"

"Possess your soul in patience, and your heart will remain in peace."

"Generosity? Ask it of God, He has it in plenty."

"Never judge. Judgment belongs to God."

"To ponder on God's happiness, and to rejoice

thereat, what a good way to keep out thoughts of self ! When there is such a grand subject to think about, how paltry seem the trifles that vex poor *me* !”

When I spoke to her of a certain trial : “ Do you not see ? It is a little flower, one with cruciform petals, which Our Lord is putting into your hand, so that you can offer it to Him.”

“ A soul truly simple sees only God in all that comes to her through creatures.”

“ An infidelity puts a barrier between ourselves and God. Jump over it: He will be pleased to have you with Him. If God were capable of sadness, He would grieve more at your aloofness than at the actual fault.”

“ Our body is given us to help us to merit, so we must make good use of it, and treat it well.”

“ After Holy Communion, the best thing to do, it seems to me, once you have adored Our Lord, is to ask His pardon, so that the Precious Blood may purify you more and more. Our Lord communicates Himself to the soul in proportion to its purity.”

“ Let us keep close to Our Lord, adoring, praising, thanking Him. That is all we have to do.”

“ God finds His glory in whatever we endure by His permission.”

“ Prayer should come easy to us at all times. It is a look we exchange with God, and He is always looking at us.”

“ When you perceive you are doing things from a purely natural motive, come back quietly to God, and say to Him: ‘ I will do better.’ ”

“ Never act without seeing the supernatural side of your action.”

“ Live a little more with God, Our Lady, and the angels. Visit heaven a little oftener in spirit, while waiting till you dwell there for ever.”



“Glorify God in every painful occurrence: ‘My God, I offer it to Thee!’”

“Do not make a fuss about little grievances. Pass them over as beneath your notice.”

“You have your faggot of miseries to bear, and you increase the load by every additional misery you stoop to pick up. How much better it would be to lay it down at the foot of the Cross, while you rest there to regain strength and courage!”

“Pray in time of success. Success gives strength, if we ask for strength in the time of success.”

“Accustom yourself to a higher level. Practise the life you will one day lead in heaven.”

After a reprimand: “I was very cruel, was I not? But I have to say what I think, when God shows it to me.”

“‘I shall meet humiliations half-way.’ Could you not word your resolution more humbly? Like this, for instance: ‘In such and such a humiliating circumstance, I shall ask of God to draw me to Himself.’”

“It is a great thing to bless God when you feel yourself put on one side. But it is sweeter and brings more glory to God when you say: ‘My God, bless her and make her succeed.’”

“Be frankly God’s own. See Him in all things. Be wholly His. Let all the activities of your life trend in this direction.”

“The power to reject useless thoughts depends upon one’s organization, more or less. But we can at least not welcome willingly whatever does not come from God or tend towards Him.”

“It is such a good thing to turn our thoughts from whatever brings sadness into the soul. This gives peace, and God dwells in peace.”

“The thought of death is just what we want. By

doing everything as if for the last time, we glorify God and increase our merit."

"God came on earth to seek me. At the moment of death He finds me. How sweet!"

"It is sad to see a soul waste her moral energies in trifles, when there is so much she can do for the glory of God."

"Make good use of little crosses. Bear them well—a secret between God and you—and do not pause to consider other people's dispositions. 'No, my God, I wish to think only of Thee!' Reject the remembrance of what has wounded your feelings, and do not examine into the why."

"This difficulty is not to be admitted into the private parlour of your mind. When you hear its knock, send down word, 'I am otherwise engaged just now, and you need not trouble to call again.' Then mount higher. 'My God, Thou hast permitted this trial; it is well. I offer it to Thee.' Renew this offering each time the bitter memory returns."

"A religious will never attain her true end if she ceases to be a living victim, ever immolated to God in reparation for the outrages He receives in the world."

An apology is perhaps needed for this lengthy extract of axioms, personal in their application. They illustrate, among other things, Sister Mary of St. Francis's power of expressing herself in epigram, a power so completely under the control of her will, that her smartest sayings never degenerated into caustic irony. She used this gift of hers to elevate and not to depress; to dilate the heart of her listener, and not to crush or stab. Her gay good-humour was always on the alert to hinder discouraging thoughts from breaking the bruised reed, or to fan to life the sparks of goodness

latent in the smouldering flax. A happy inspiration has preserved for us this sample of her counsels to one member of the Namur community; but each of the others came in turn under the same calm, uplifting influence, and had her share in the treasures of that resourceful motherly heart.

And at that period the Sisters in Belgium needed all the help and comfort they could get from their Superiors, for the work of the Institute was both heavy and anxious during the eventful years which heralded the advent of the Catholic party in politics to its long tenure of ministerial responsibility. In 1878 the Liberals came into office with a big majority, and they made use of their little day to sever religion from the education of the working classes. Most of the elementary schools were the property of the Communes. From each of these, by an iniquitous statute, all pious emblems were banished, and it was made illegal to impart within their precincts the Christian teaching so solemnly guaranteed by the Constitution of 1830. The Belgian nation did not tamely brook this outrage on its Catholic conscience. It is now a matter of history how in 1884, just after the Eucharistic Congress had been held at Liège, a Catholic Ministry came into power and for nigh upon thirty years has given the lie to the calumny that the Church is a foe to modern progress and culture.

But it is a trite truism that the darkest hour comes ever before the dawn, and the brief interval of Liberal supremacy (from 1878 to 1884) was no exception to the rule. The following set of anecdotes has been supplied by one who was in the noviciate at Namur from May, 1881, till April, 1882.

“Catholic Belgium bided its time till the next Parliamentary election, when, it was quietly deter-

mined, things were to right themselves, as indeed they did. Meanwhile the little ones could not waste in ignorance the plastic, receptive years of childhood, and the Bishops had forbidden attendance at the godless, communal schools. So barns and outhouses were hired for the nonce, and there the ejected Catholic teachers struggled gallantly on, with crowded classes and the scantiest apparatus, utilizing the very doors as blackboards; while the communal schools remained in some localities without pupils. I heard of one schoolmistress who drew her salary for knitting in front of empty benches, while her own daughters were sent off each day to be educated by the nearest nuns.

“ In some cases the authorities were powerless to evict the Sisters; wherever, for instance, the schools were the property of the Institute, or where, as at Verviers, the wording of the endowment provided that the teaching of the girls should remain in the hands of the Sisters of Notre Dame. Certain orphanages and the reformatory at Beernem were also out of harm's way; and our Training College at Bastogne became, for the time being, a private establishment, supported by voluntary contributions, and inspected by a diocesan board of examiners. Of course, the students in training could not under existing conditions expect to receive any teaching diploma which would be recognized by Government; but then, as I have already mentioned, it was confidently calculated that these conditions would be improved out of existence at the next election.

“ Party spirit ran high. In many cases workmen's chances of work and tradesmen's chances of custom depended largely on the school which their little ones attended. One labourer protested to his employer that his children ran off every morning, despite his

express prohibition, to the classes taught by the Sisters of Charity. The employer, unable to disprove the story, insisted on a warrant for the committal of these disobedient youngsters to the reformatory of the district, and conducted them thither himself. Great was his disgust to find he had simply insured their education for a definite term of years under the Sisters of Notre Dame at Beernem.

“When Easter came round, the consciences of parents awakened, and the Catholic schools became crowded to inconvenience. One of my fellow-novices had trouble in her class with a very rowdy new-comer, whose stock of monkey-tricks was exhausted before the patience of the mistress showed symptoms of weakening. At last she ‘planted herself’ in front of the rostrum, with an impertinent stare. The poor young Sister meanwhile felt at her wits’ end. One thing she knew she had not to do. On no account might she shake the child, however sore the provocation. When school was dismissed she sought counsel of the head-mistress; but before she had time to explain, some of the elder girls came running back to say they had heard the new girl tell a man in the street, who was evidently waiting for her: ‘I could not manage to make her hit me.’

“‘And you may thank God she could not,’ remarked Mère Blandine, when she told us the tale. ‘It would have meant a trip to the police-court, and certainly not in the religious habit.’

“We stopped at Antwerp, on our way to England, after the Easter vows. There we saw Sister Mary Nepomucene standing in the courtyard to give a lesson through the open window of her classroom, which was literally packed with pupils. We asked her how she managed on a rainy day. ‘Oh, then,’ she answered,

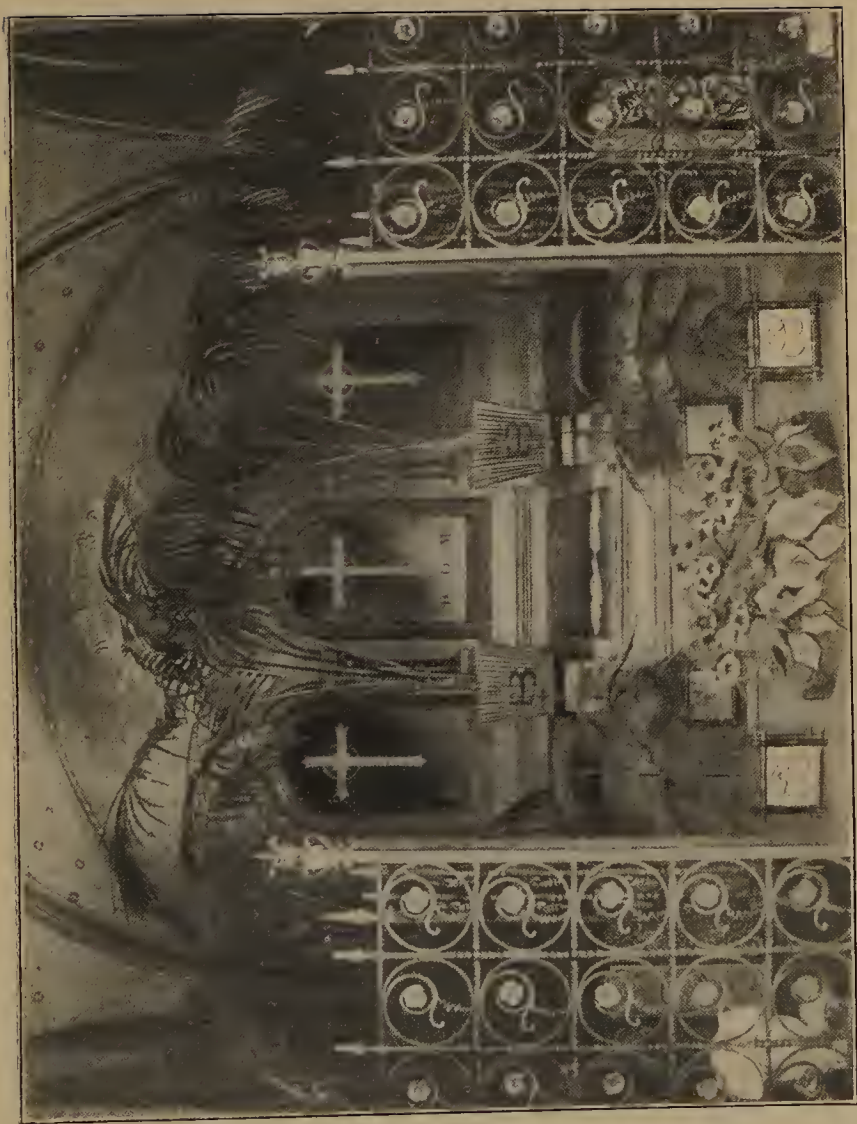


‘some of the sickly ones stay at home, and there is room for me inside.’ ”

In this period of storm and stress, when energy and powers of endurance were taxed to the utmost, the Sisters must often have thanked God that they had been inspired to choose for their Superior-General one so calm and prudent as Mère Aloysie. She had surpassed their expectations by taking the initiative in an enterprise which was to buoy them up with glad, hopeful courage, amid the sea of troubles in which they were plunged.

Things looked very dismal at Namur from the natural as well as the political point of view on the 21st of December, 1880. Little did the Sisters dream, as they rose from their beds that morning, what fatigues and disasters were in store for them in the day; and as little did they forecast all the glory and the graces of which it was the harbinger! All was confusion in the city. The River Meuse, swollen by rains and melting snows, had overflowed its banks, until the houses were under water up to the second floor, and boats plied to and fro in the streets. In the Convent of Notre Dame all the cellars were flooded, and the gardens and court-yards looked like lakes. The pretty Gothic chapel in the grounds was ankle-deep in ooze, and those who had knowledge of the treasure interred beneath thanked God that the vault at least was water-tight.

However, when the floods subsided, it was discovered that the water had leaked through the floor of the chapel, and that the very precautions taken to secure immunity from damp left no outlet for the dank liquid in which two of the three coffins were found immersed. The third coffin, enclosing the relics of our venerated Foundress, Mère Julie, had escaped with comparatively little damage.



NAMUR CONVENT, 1883: TOMBS IN GARDEN CHAPEL



After the requisite legal and ecclesiastical preliminaries, the bones of our three first mothers, reverently cleansed and deposited in three separate oaken chests, were transferred to one of the sacristies, and afterwards to the Chapel of the Children of Mary. Pilgrims came to pray in steady stream, and miraculous favours were evidently the answer to their prayers. Every heart felt, "God wills to glorify His faithful servants."

And so in the following April, "the Reverend Mother-General and the Religious of the Congregation of Notre Dame at Namur" besought Monseigneur Gravez, their Bishop and official Superior, "to institute proceedings preliminary to the introduction of the Cause of Beatification, for the Reverend Mothers Julie and St. Joseph, the foundresses of their Congregation."

The episcopal permission was granted on the spot.

"But, my Lord," protested the astonished secretary, "will you not deliberate and pray a little over a matter of such importance?"

"Much prayer and deliberation went before the writing of that letter," was the confident answer. "I always grant, offhand, Mère Aloysie's requests, and I have never yet had reason to repent it."

Such was the origin of the process which ended in the Beatification of the Servant of God, Julie Billiart, on the 13th of May, 1906, only to begin again with a view to her Canonization. The Cause of Mère St. Joseph, we have reason to hope, has only been postponed. The memory of our second foundress is held in benediction among the Sisters of Notre Dame. Sister Mary of St. Francis venerated her with tender devotion, and towards the end of her life made the writings of this servant of God her special study in time of retreat.

## CHAPTER XXIV

“ ABSTULIT QUI DEDIT ”\*

“ How pleasant are thy paths, O Death !  
Like the bright slanting West  
Thou leadest down into the glow,  
Where all the heaven-bound sunsets go  
Ever from toil to rest.”

FABER.

THE 14th of September, 1877, brought round the twenty-fifth anniversary of Sister Mary of St. Francis's religious profession. There was a quiet family festival held on the day itself in the Namur community, and just before it Dr. Danell, Bishop of Southwark, crossed over to Belgium to offer in person his congratulations, and to thank her in the name of English Catholics for the glorious educational work she had enabled her Sisters to accomplish in her native land.

None of the illuminated addresses sent her from the various convents have been preserved; and as for the handsome set of candelabra which was the Jubilee thank-offering of the Institute in England, she persuaded Ma Mère to present them, on the first convenient opportunity, to “ Our Lady of the Ramparts,” a shrine very dear to the inhabitants of Namur, for was not the statue venerated there the city's precious palladium throughout the wars of the last three centuries? It was a joy to her to give this filial token of

\* Stafford motto.



devotion to our Immaculate Mother, and the circumstances of the offering were quite in keeping with her graceful tact to avoid unobtrusively all personal marks of honour. God had been very good to her throughout the quarter of a century. The hundredfold, promised in this world to those who leave all for His sake, had been hers in good measure, and the remembrance of past mercies and graces was a source of glad, humble thanksgiving and an incentive to fresh efforts in the interests of His glory.

This Jubilee feeling was prolonged through a series of years, as eleven out of the convents, whose beginning and growth she had so lovingly fostered, celebrated, each in its turn, the twenty-fifth completed year of devoted service in God's Vineyard. Her holy gladness on these occasions was unsullied by any reflection of self-complacency. She rejoiced whole-heartedly in the record of results achieved, but she never could understand why reference should be made to her share therein.

“Do not thank me,” she used to say. “I was but the instrument of Divine Providence. God entrusted me with a certain amount of worldly goods (she says nothing of her talents and administrative labours), and then He sent me here that He might use them accordingly to His own good pleasure. To Him alone all thanks are due!”

We have seen in her reply to the Jubilee address from former Sisters of the Infant Jesus (p. 204) how deftly she ignored all allusions to her own share in the matter of their affiliation. She adopted a similar attitude of aloofness when came the turn of the Liverpool Training College. Between 1856 and 1881 Mount Pleasant had sent forth above a thousand qualified schoolmistresses, most of them with first-class rank; and two hundred

of its former students were members of various religious Orders. But Sister Mary of St. Francis read its Jubilee record with mixed feelings: joy in the success achieved, surprise and vexation at the inevitable allusions to "old me." She would hardly allow the novices at Saint Ignace a sight of the verses written for the occasion.

Still Our Lord has taught us: "Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart"; and her oblation of all she had and was, in the service of her Sisters and the little ones they taught, was rewarded amply by the flourishing condition of our English convents and schools. She continued to govern and advise them by her letters to the very month of her death—informed of their doings till the end, and dictating when her fingers were too feeble to hold a pen.

The last visit to England with Mère Aloysie was in 1883, when her increasing infirmities were painfully evident, and the precarious state of her health a source of grave anxiety. Several houses were deprived of the pleasure of her presence, and she made prolonged stays at Clapham, Mount Pleasant, and Birkdale, while Mère Aloysie went alone to the convents in the neighbourhood.

The sea-air at Birkdale seemed to do her good, and she asked to be wheeled to the parish church to pray there for the last time before the Tabernacle. The Sisters of the north visited her at Birkdale or Mount Pleasant, while members of the Norwich and Plymouth communities came to Clapham at the end of July.

"Sister Mary of St. Francis was then too weak to see us individually," writes one, "but I shall never forget notre chère Mère's beautiful watchfulness and care for her, and her reverential manner to notre chère Mère. It recalled those happy noviciate days when to see together Mère Constantine, Mère Aloysie, and



CLAPHAM CONVENT



Sister Mary of St. Francis was to see realized the ideal of religious love and reverence. My own mother died while we were at Clapham, and dear Sister Mary of St. Francis met me coming out of chapel.

“ ‘ O my poor child ! ’ she said, taking both my hands. ‘ It is the greatest sorrow of one’s life. We *will* pray for you. ’

“ She spoke with such deep feeling that the thought came to me at once, ‘ How she must have loved her own mother ! ’ ”

In Sister Mary of St. Francis, indeed, family affection remained strong all through life. Neither lapse of time, nor distance of place, availed to diminish her tender interest in those she loved.

“ My heart really bleeds for you,” she wrote to Mrs. de Lisle, on seeing in the *Tablet* that she had lost her eldest son. “ You have, I know, every consolation and hope for his dear soul’s happiness. He will be recommended to the prayers of the community, and so will you. I am in retreat, but I asked leave to tell you how much I feel for you, and that I will pray.”

The like “ merciful tolls of the great bell,” as she phrased it, were heard more frequently as the years sped on, and one after another her earliest and nearest friends were summoned before the Judgment-Seat of their loving Redeemer. She felt these bereavements very keenly, though so judiciously had she formed her friendships that the hopeful consolations she could put before Mrs. de Lisle were hers in every case. The following letter may serve as a sample of her unselfish, helpful affection at a time when her heart was very sore at the prospect of the last earthly parting with a valued Sister in religion.



*"October 3rd, 1881.*

"MY DEAREST SISTER MARY COLUMBA,

"How can I thank you enough for your dear letter and good wishes for my feast? Its announcement saddens our dear Mère's heart and my own, but I still hope in the blessing of the Last Sacraments, and cling to the expectation of better news. Dear Sister, you are always near my heart, and your dear Sister, too. May you receive strength and comfort in your severe trials, and may they bring you so close to our Heavenly Father that our prayers will be little needed to bring you to the union that is the great need of our being, and where we shall all meet in endless bliss. I go on praying and hoping.

"Ever, my dear Sister,

"Your most affectionate

"SISTER MARY OF ST. FRANCIS."

"P.S.—My holy patron promised to protect the friends of those who tried to honour him. So he will take great care of *you*."

The following year Lady Lovat died. In 1884 Sister Mary of St. Francis lost her two remaining brothers: Charles, on April 10th, in his seventy-seventh year; and on the 30th of November, Henry Valentine, ninth Baron Stafford, at the venerable age of eighty-two. He had always been her favourite brother—never a year passed without some days being spent in each other's company—and so an English Superior, visiting Namur at the time of his death, was greatly edified by her calm and loving submission to the Will of God in the midst of her affectionate grief.

We subjoin some sentences from the discourse at his funeral which, because of their accuracy, brought

truest comfort, and even aroused in her emotions of heartfelt thankfulness. “To many of us for a series of years Lord Stafford has been no stranger. We have known and watched closely his life, and it will bear microscopic examination. His simple and manly religion, in private and in public, was not of that emotional kind, too often seen and too much favoured. It was deep, sustained, ever flowing like a bright stream of supernatural grace, which reached and beautified every part of his existence. He lived by faith as the just man must ever do, Catholic in his instincts, his endeavours, his aims. His charity was munificent, bounded only by his means; and it is a proverb in every mouth how he exercised hospitality to high and low—to Princes and Princesses as well as to the farmers who were his tenants, and the labourers on his estates whom he delighted to regale. Of his ceaseless kindness to the poor, the sick, and the aged, let those speak who were the grateful recipients of his bounteous gifts. Their names and their numbers are known to God alone, for the giver was careful to conceal them as far as he could. A meeker and a humbler man I have never known among his peers in rank and wealth and mental endowments. He feared and served God, he heard and obeyed the Church.”

Sister Mary of St. Francis was now the sole survivor of her family. She had still eighteen months before her of gallant struggle between ill-health and work, and it was a marvel to her Sisters how much business she got through, and how unfalteringly her indomitable will sanctified her sufferings to the last, by cheerful attention to the duties of her charge and state.

On the 20th of June, 1885, we find her writing to the Reverend Mother for her feast day:

“ You know my heart as you do your own, and it is the great joy of my life to have you to help me to go to God.

“ A thousand thanks to you. A thousand blessings on you, *ma chère Mère*.

“ The most grateful of your children,

“ SISTER MARY OF ST. FRANCIS.”

A month later she accompanied, for the last time, this beloved Mother on one of her Belgian visitations. They remained a day or two longer than usual at Tirlemont, as the air seemed to do her so much good. She enjoyed sitting in the garden there, watching the children at their games ; and the little ones used to run to her with their copybooks, their toys, and their artless confidences.

Her placid and cheerful temper, at any rate, remained to the end the reverse of “ gouty.”

The Feast of St. Francis (October 4th) passed joyously and quietly ; but during the winter her health slowly but perceptibly failed, and her sufferings increased. Had she a presentiment it was for the last time when, on the 31st of December, she penned her New Year’s greeting to her dear *Mère Aloysie* ?

“ I feel so powerless to say all that I feel, to express to you, as I should like to do, my affection and my gratitude. Our good God knows it all, and He is Almighty to reward you. May your dear life be happy in the midst of great work for souls !

“ To second your efforts and to help you a little, that is one of my great desires, and another is that God may hear the prayers you address Him for us, your dear children of Namur, and for the whole of your big family of Notre Dame.

“ Your most affectionate and submissive

“ SISTER MARY OF ST. FRANCIS.”

On the Epiphany the English novices gathered round her for the last time, and she related to them a little incident of her earlier years, à propos of a slight dispute concerning nationality which had arisen between them and the Belgians:

“Once when I was in Rome we visited St. Peter’s with Dr. Grant and a little boy (the present Sir Wilfrid Lawson), and we stopped before two statues, St. Dominic and St. Ignatius. ‘What!’ cried the lad, ‘St. Dominic here beside St. Ignatius!’

“‘Well,’ said Dr. Grant, ‘and why not? The saints don’t object to one another’s company.’

“Now, Sisters, you all mean to be saints. Why not begin here and now the life of perfect harmony you purpose to enjoy together up in heaven?”

At the end of January she made her last retreat, and asked leave to prolong the eight days to ten, her usual practice whenever headache or other disabling ailment interrupted the course of the spiritual exercises. This time she caught a severe chill, which further increased her weakness, and henceforth she was unable to retain solid food. In Passion Week attacks of faintness supervened. She was no longer permitted to assist at Mass, and rarely, indeed, on account of frequent nausea, had she the privilege of Holy Communion.

Nevertheless she omitted none of her customary duties. The Namur Sisters consulted her in detail as to the devotions and penitential exercises each had planned to undertake in Lent, and she saw each one in turn again after the Easter retreat. She held, too, lengthy consultations with the mistresses of the boarding-school in reference to proposed alterations in the scheme of studies.

Her English correspondence went on just as usual.

“Oh, how happy we shall be in heaven!” she one

day exclaimed. "No more letters to write, no more post, no more departures! But"—with a sudden change of tone—"there will be plenty of arrivals."

As the months dragged on, however, matters affecting the welfare of the Congregation in England were more and more entrusted to the prudence of Sister Marie Thérésia, whose suggestions were invited, and to whom the reason for certain arrangements were explained in detail. "What should I do without you?" occurs in touching postscript to a purely business letter.

Thus did this valiant woman set all things in readiness beforehand, and calmly provide that her death should disturb as little as possible the ordinary routine of the Institute's machinery. Thus did she endeavour to lighten as far as might be the anxieties of the already overburdened Superior-General.

"Ma Mère does the work of four people," she said a little wistfully, as she had every day fresh evidence of the Reverend Mother's "caretaking" attitude towards herself, of her eagerness to undertake, in addition to her own heavy charge, the special functions of the Superior of Namur.

But there was one set of duties of which Mère Aloysie could not relieve her assistant—the arrangements for her own golden jubilee of religious profession in the coming September. These preparations were a labour of love to Sister Mary of St. Francis, who was most desirous that the whole Congregation, on both sides of the Atlantic, should act in unison as to festivities, prayers, and the increased scale of almsgiving usual on such occasions.

The memorial gifts to the convent church at Namur were also to be worthy of the event. America, it was decided, should offer a marble statue of the Sacred Heart. Belgium undertook stained-glass windows for



the sanctuary. The English houses presented altar-rails in marble and ornamental brass, while “François,” a clock with four faces to chime the quarters from the central tower, was the special thank-offering of the head of the Namur community.

Sister Mary of St. Francis was treasurer of the Jubilee Fund, and the Belgian and English Superiors consulted her when in doubt as to the amount they could conscientiously contribute. There was a mammoth strike going on in the Borinage, a populous mining locality of Hainault, where thousands of colliers out of work blackmailed the district, threatening to loot and burn the houses where they were refused money and food. There were other and more bashful forms of misery which the Sisters in the neighbourhood felt bound to alleviate to the utmost of their power.

“I can readily believe that your means are very limited,” said Sister Mary of St. Francis to the Superior of one of the Hainault houses. “You have shared all you had with your charming friends on strike. But you really must contribute something, however little, to the stained-glass windows. I cannot have Lodelinsart unrepresented.”

The English gift was also much in her thoughts. The plan of the communion rails had been submitted to her approval, and on the 19th of May she returned it to Sister Marie Thérésia with the last letter entirely in her own handwriting.

“I have had the beading removed from the brass-work,” she told her, “and the knobs from the marble pilasters. I thought them puerile.”

She had arranged for the altar-rails to be in place by the 10th of July. But, alas! even as she wrote, all idea of festivities had been abandoned outside her sick-

room. The invalid was not regaining strength. In the middle of May Ma Mère insisted that she should consult Dr. Lefèvre, an eminent physician from Louvain, and he agreed with Dr. Bribosia, who usually attended her in sickness, that the heart worked neither freely nor regularly, and that its impeded action enlarged the liver and compressed the other digestive organs. Humanly speaking, her cure was pronounced impossible, but still her sorrowing Sisters clung to the hope of prolonging her precious life by miracle, and continued to "batter the gates of heaven with storms of prayer."

Novenas of Masses were said for this intention at Lourdes, at Montaigu, by Don Bosco, and in the Church of Our Lady of Victories. In America, as in Europe, the Sisters of Notre Dame invoked their beloved foundress in her behalf, privately, of course, for as yet no *cultus* of the Servant of God had been authorized by Holy Church. On Whit Sunday and the two following days there was a continuous stream of pilgrimage to the tomb in the Garden Chapel. Sisters and children prayed with the greatest fervour and confidence, and the novices took turns, so that some of them might always be kneeling before the precious relics.

The invalid herself had no illusions as to the serious nature of her malady. On May 11th she was seated in her arm-chair looking worn and ill, when some newly professed Sisters came to take a last farewell before starting for England.

"The doctors say they can cure me," she told them, "and I suppose I must believe them."

On Whit Sunday, a month later, she confided to the chaplain:

"Everyone tells me I shall recover, but I myself do



SANCTUARY IN CONVENT CHURCH, NAMUR



not think so. At any rate, it is well to be on the safe side, and so I am getting ready for death. You will help me, will you not?”

She then went to Confession, and expressed a strong desire to receive Holy Communion, owning herself, however, incapable of the Sacramental fast. The chaplain offered to ask leave from the bishop for Holy Viaticum.

“Oh, how happy it would make me!” she exclaimed. “How grateful I shall be to you if you obtain me this grace! I know I shall not recover, and Holy Communion will help me to face death with steadfast calm. All my temporal affairs are in order.”

After a pause she added: “I remember reading that it is not enough to suffer unless we offer our pains to God. I offer Him all mine from this day forward.”

But as far as she could she forbore to speak of her sufferings, and, not to sadden her Sisters, made no allusion to impending death.

“Where do you feel most pain, dear Sister Superior?” the infirmarians sometimes inquired.

“I can hardly tell you,” she would answer; “I ache from head to foot.” But when Mère Aloysie put the same question, she used to smile bravely, not to afflict her affectionate friend, and murmur: “Just a little, dear Mother, just a very little.”

On Whit Monday she received Holy Viaticum, and it seemed to those around her as if Our Lord’s sacramental visit imparted, for the time being, fresh vigour to her worn-out frame. That morning Dr. Bribosia remained longer than usual in the sick-room, and on leaving it he seemed strangely moved.

“What an affliction the loss of your dear Superior will be to you all!” he said. “She has just been talking to me with all her old charm of manner. Her



mental faculties are as bright as ever, but we must give up all hope of prolonging her precious life."

Next day he said plainly that the end could not be far off, and that it was time to administer the last rites of Holy Church.

Whit-week is one of the times when, in obedience to the Sacred Canons "extraordinary," confessors named by the bishop present themselves at the different convents, and Père Libstadt, S.J., who for many years had been her spiritual father at these seasons, was asked to tell her the doctor's opinion. In a sketch of her virtues which he wrote afterwards the following passage occurs:

"Such a beautiful life could not but be crowned with a beautiful death. I shall always remember with edified emotion the calm, holy resignation with which she greeted my suggestion as to the Last Sacraments.

" 'Oh yes,' she said, 'I should be very glad to receive them, and I am quite ready. But I fear to alarm *ma pauvre chère Mère*.'

"The next time I saw her she said to me:

" 'I was anointed on Tuesday, and I am so happy. I feel so entirely in the hands of God. He may dispose of me now according to His own good pleasure. *Ma chère Mère* and the Sisters want to keep me. God's Will be done.'

Extreme Unction was administered to her very quietly on the morning of Whit Tuesday. Few of the Sisters were present. "We must spare Sister Superior all undue emotion," Mère Aloysie had decided.

"The sole emotion I feel," smiled the invalid, "is a deep, deep sense of gratitude. It is the first great grace from *Ma Mère Julie*," she added, in allusion to the novena ending that day.

The Blessed Sacrament was reserved from Mass till

Benediction in the little sanctuary over the tomb, and the novices sang English hymns as they passed her windows escorting the Most Holy back to the church. Only then did they learn by the public recital of the Penitential Psalms that their beloved Superior had that day received Extreme Unction.

"Her recovery will be all the more striking," they thought, so strong was their confidence in the wished-for miracle. But during the evening meditation, as they afterwards acknowledged, a sense of resignation crept into their souls, enabling each to say with perfect calm.

"My Father, not our will, but Thine."

Once the Last Sacraments were administered, the Professed Sisters were allowed to come to the sick-room in little groups. She greeted all with a smile and pleasant words of exhortation, gratitude, or comfort. Once her features were contracted with sudden spasms of pain, and they exclaimed:

"Oh, you are suffering, dear Sister Superior!"

"Yes," she answered simply; "but it is so good for my soul."

Sometimes, too, the poor head drooped, and the weary eyelids closed.

"Forgive me, my dear Sisters," she whispered; "if I do not look at you. I see you all in the Sacred Heart of Our Lord."

"Does she really know us?" thought a Sister with whom she frequently spoke English; and as if in answer the dying Superior looked at her affectionately, and murmured in her native tongue:

"And how is your dear mother?"

At intervals she looked her own bright self.

"You must be better," said the chaplain cheerily on the 18th. "You are looking splendid!"

"What a pity I cannot see myself!" she answered, laughing.

Then she profited of the momentary vigour to express to him her grateful sense of the devoted care lavished on her by the Sisters. She tried, too, to speak of Ma Mère, but she was so overcome by the mention of that dear name that she could but bow her head, and renew to God the sacrifice of this great and tender affection.

That evening Sister Marie Thérésia and Sister Mary of St. Philip arrived from Liverpool. The Training College inspection was actually in progress, and she showed herself aware of the fact as she greeted them gaily, shaking her forefinger.

“So you have run away from your work! Naughty girls!”

But she thanked them repeatedly for coming, and whispered to Sister Marie Thérésia as she pointed to the Reverend Mother:

“I am so glad you are here for the sake of that dear one. She is a saint!”

The travellers had many privileged visits to the sick-room during the ensuing week. Sister Mary of St. Francis, “as clear as ever in her intellect,” discussed business matters, inquired after their friends by name, and made arrangements for their personal comfort during their stay at Namur.

Sister Mary of St. Philip took notes for the benefit of her Sisters in England, and from these we select the following details:

“*June 19th.*—Dear Sister Superior had a restless night. In the morning she had Holy Communion. She looked almost herself—quite a beautiful colour in her cheeks, and such an expression of recollected holiness! Ma Mère read the Acts for Communion. Just before the priest came in, she said:

“ ‘Et l’intention, Ma Mère?’ ”

"She was always so particular to mark down her Communions for the dead Sisters. . . ."

"*Sunday, June 20th.*—Yesterday, while we were with her, Ma Mère offered her a little wine. Such a beautiful Sign of the Cross, and then she looked up, and said:

" 'A votre santé !'

"Each time the bell rings she makes the Sign of the Cross with such devotion. Our Sister Superior [Marie Thérésia] remarked on this, and she instantly replied:

" 'I don't see you make any. . . .'

"*Monday, June 21st.*—We took Sister Superior the watch she had asked us to get for her to give Ma Mère, and she seemed so pleased as she handed it to her, saying:

" 'Pour votre fête, ma chère Mère !'

"Poor Ma Mère said, in answer to her good wishes:

" 'The only feast I wish for is your cure, Sister Superior. Without that there is no feast for me. . . .'

"*Wednesday, June 23rd.*—The night has been restless. She made the Sign of the Cross at every hour, and spoke much to the two Sisters who were sitting up. As she wished to change from her arm-chair to the bed, they went for a third Sister to help to move her.

" 'Poor Sisters!' she exclaimed, 'how I pity you! I am giving you so much trouble. You will merit Heaven on account of me. I shall stay a little longer in my chair.'

" 'Do not think of us,' they implored. 'Tell us what you really wish.'

" 'What I wish?' she repeated. 'Your salvation and my own.'

"In moving her they could not avoid hurting her poor swollen leg, and she gave a little groan, but she changed it immediately to—

“ ‘ Merci, mon Dieu !’

“ To-day her speech is rather indistinct. There was no sustained conversation, but she held the hand of our Superior [Sister Marie Thérésia], and pressed it from time to time, saying:

“ ‘ Ma grande amie !’

“ Poor Ma Mère spent the greater part of the day with her. She seemed restless and suffering. Holy Communion was brought her for the last time. We heard her say:

“ ‘ Et les actes, Ma Mère ?’

“ Instantly Ma Mère was at her side reading the Acts quite calmly, while dear Sister Superior followed her with great devotion, reminding her again:

“ ‘ Et l'intention ?’

“ A little before she had told M. l'Aumonier:

“ ‘ I shall offer this Communion to pay all my debts towards the deceased Sisters and the holy souls in Purgatory. Do pray for me; I can hardly say a prayer myself. . . .’ ”

“ *Thursday, June 24th.*—Dear Sister Superior had a terrible night, did not sleep at all. When they offered to move her, it was always—

“ ‘ Just as you please.’

“ She prayed continually:

“ ‘ My God, help me ! My God, give me patience !’

“ She rambled a little, and kept repeating ‘ I must go.’ When they asked her where she wished to go, she usually answered, ‘ To heaven !’ or ‘ To Paradise !’ but once it was ‘ To Liverpool !’

“ She talked mostly in English, but at four she said in French: ‘ I am dying !’

“ ‘ No, you are not !’ answered Sister Véronique. ‘ You may not die now; Ma Mère would not be pleased.’

“ Ma Mère spent the greater part of the day in the



sick-room. Sister Superior seemed in pain, and kept repeating:

“ ‘ Let me go to heaven !’

“ At nine the bishop paid her a visit—his third since Whit Sunday—and at eleven the chaplain gave her the Pope’s blessing (telegraphed from Rome by Cardinal Howard), and the Indulgences of the Rosary and the Scapulars.

“ ‘ I am trying to suffer *well* to the end,’ she told him. ‘ It cannot be far off now. Give me your blessing that I may suffer *well*.’

“ At half-past three he came again, but found it impossible to administer Holy Communion. She seemed in pain, and not quite conscious.

“ ‘ Help me, help me, help me to go to the good God !’ she kept repeating.

“ ‘ You would like to have Holy Communion ?’

“ ‘ Oh yes ! give me, give me all that God wants me to have. . . . Give me your blessing that I may go to heaven. Lift me up to heaven. Give, give me, ma pauvre chère Mère. . . .’ And she held out both her arms.”

Then the chaplain left her for a time. Mère Aloysie resumed her post beside her, and the pitiful entreaty began again:

“ Let me go to heaven !”

This time Ma Mère realized that she was asking formal permission to die, and at once braced herself to express acquiescence in the bitter parting. On the instant an expression of deep peace stole over the countenance of the dying religious, and her physical suffering lessened so perceptibly that the infirmarian in attendance asked leave to spend her allotted half-hour in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

"And mine too!" said Sister Mary of St. Francis. They were her last words.

Hardly had the infirmarian gone out of the room than the death pallor crept over her features, and the community was hastily summoned.

The chaplain came, too, to give the Last Blessing and to recite the prayers for the dying, and before these were finished, just as the clock chimed half-past four, Sister Mary of St. Francis breathed her last without struggle or sign of pain.

"One great soul less on earth, one more in heaven," are the concluding words of Sister Mary of St. Philip's account.

Before quitting the apartment all present recited the six Paters and six Aves to apply to her as quickly as possible the Indulgences attached to the Blue Scapular of the Immaculate Conception. It will be remembered that this was her own practice on hearing of the death of any of her Sisters in religion.

Four to five, the Sisters noted, was her "hour of guard" in honour of the Sacred Heart. The date of her death, too, had its consoling associations.

"She is finishing Corpus Christi in heaven," remarked a pupil, "and thanking Our Lord for having given us the Blessed Sacrament." In the world, as we have already mentioned, she always tried to make some costly present to Our Lord on this great festival of His love for us.

That year, too—1886—Corpus Christi fell on the 24th of June, when the Church commemorates the birth of Our Lord's precursor, whose special mission it was to "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children," fitting prototype of her educational work in England during the "second spring."

During the three days that elapsed before the

funeral there was a constant stream of visitors to take a last look at the placid and noble features, beautiful in death's last sleep, to touch her hands with rosaries and medals, and to join with her kneeling Sisters in prayer for her soul.

The first to deposit his wreath on the bier was Mère Aloysie's great-nephew, a baby of four, who had been a special pet of Sister Mary of St. Francis. Soon the room was fragrant with flowers.

On Saturday the coffin was removed to a *chapelle ardente*, improvised in the vestibule facing the Church. At her head was the life-sized crucifix which is believed to have spoken and bled in far-off Guatemala, and through the open door at the foot of the bier could be seen the sanctuary, which was ablaze with lights during the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament throughout that sorrowful Sunday.

At nine o'clock next morning thirty-six priests assembled round the altar for the Requiem Mass, and the community and boarders were crowded in the spacious galleries of the church to make room in the nave for the very large congregation from the town, representative of all classes of society. The Vicar-General, Monseigneur Cousot, preached an eloquent discourse, and at half-past ten the funeral procession set out for the cemetery.

The cross came first, and then the orphans, and the different grades of day-scholars taught by the Sisters. Behind the hearse walked the pupils of the Convent High School, clad in deep mourning and carrying the wreaths and floral crosses sent by friends. These were followed by a vast throng desirous of giving this last tribute of respect and esteem, and last of all came a long file of carriages. All along the route there was sympathetic silence, and the shops were closed.

As the procession passed from town to country the mourners came face to face with a large detachment of Lancers. At sight of the cross the troops lined up on either side of the road, the music ceased, and lances were lowered in respectful salute.

In the afternoon nearly nine hundred large loaves were distributed in dole to the poor of the town.

The hearts of all Sisters of Notre Dame were turned to the Mother-House during the sorrowful days we have just described. But the routine of the Institute went on just as usual. At Namur itself, on the day after Corpus Christi, we find Monseigneur Cousot taking his usual class of mental science at the boarding-school. But it is not surprising that the lesson gravitated to Sister Mary of St. Francis's career of usefulness in the world and in religion.

"You see, young ladies," he concluded, "how contempt of human respect gives happiness to the soul. Sister Superior did not lose, but gained a hundredfold when she gave up all things to work for the love of God. And what you do not see, but what you know by faith, is the immense glory which God reserves in heaven for those who have employed their faculties to promote His glory upon earth."

At Mount Pleasant Training College, too, despite the departure of Superior and Principal, the inspectors went on with the work of examination as usual, and met in conference the delegates from the Catholic Poor School Committee. The Sisters had to listen to many eulogistic speeches, that of Mr. Allies being most in harmony with their actual frame of mind.

First of all he expressed regret that Mr. Fitch, the newly appointed head inspector, had had only a "transient glimpse" of the motherliness of Sister

Marie Thérésia and the “informing influence” of Sister Mary of St. Philip. He then went on:

“And the cause of their absence is a matter of deepest grief to the Committee, connected as it is with the illness of one to whom the Training College, in which we stand, owes its very existence, to myself especially who was brought into personal relations with her at the time of its foundation.”

Here he briefly recapitulated Sister Mary of St. Francis’s share in these struggling beginnings.

“Now, without underrating the aid given by the Government, I say that it was her money which raised these walls, and I think you will see that the one thousand two hundred and seventy-two students who have passed through this college owe to her, in one sense at least, the training they have here received. . . . Without her initiative neither this institution nor perhaps the nineteen other flourishing houses of the Congregation throughout the country could ever have existed. Praise I know is dangerous to everyone, especially to a nun; but she will soon be, is perhaps now while I am speaking, past the point when it can do harm, if indeed these words of praise should ever reach her.

“You see now the personal link which binds you individually to Sister Mary of St. Francis. You are living here, thanks to her, while she is dying, and you are taught by those who call themselves her Sisters. And what is the lesson you are to learn from her life? What was it that made her so devote herself? It was charity—the triple charity of Nazareth, of Bethlehem, of Calvary.”

The retreat at Mount Pleasant ended that year on the 25th of July, so there were many Sisters from the Lancashire convents in its chapel at the pontifical



Requiem Mass for the month's mind of Sister Mary of St. Francis. Twenty priests were present. Many more sent regrets that, owing to the inconvenience of the hour (9 a.m.) and the day (Saturday), they were unable to take part "in this tribute of respect to one whose life of unostentatious sacrifice, comparatively little known because passed in a foreign land, was the source of many and wide-spreading blessings to the children of the poor in her own England."

Canon Carr, V.G., who had known and helped the Sisters since their first installation at Islington Flagg, voiced the feelings of his brother priests when he expressed to the community deep sympathy in the loss they had just sustained.

"If ever it can be said of anyone who has worked here for God, 'Her works follow her,' surely it is of the Sister whose memory we keep to-day. Yes, 'her work follows her,' and will follow her until the last day, for it is going on and has passed into your hands. And every child you teach or benefit is a work which goes up to her—not to increase her recompense (for God in His goodness anticipates all that, and gives the whole reward at once), but still to add to her accidental glory. What better can you do than to carry on her work in the spirit of which she has left you so bright an example?"

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